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coming home!**HARDWARE ROUND-UP**

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We rate six of the best!

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most...
The skilled general...
nor does he transport supplies three times...
need to do so.

the cap... in this way is the...
enemy's defeat used to supplement our strength.
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It is through an understanding of warfare that the general
protects the security of his people and of his nation.

It is the year...
Alliance is being invaded...
Terra. On Morningstar...
Alliance, veteran soldiers...
final desperate defense to...
in a brutal ground war.

Doc. 3 American Army in action



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...giving Empire of
...planet of the
...Angelus leads a
...from annihilation



Doc. 6 Vlaana Azleaa
Terran Empire



Doc. 7 Northern Star Alliance Army
fighting on Morningstar Prime

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rewarding and entertaining
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PC Zone

**"We're really looking
forward to the fully-finished
shell-shocker"**

PC Gamer

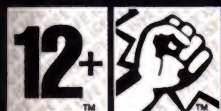


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UNREAL ENGINE 3.0 P28

Unbelievable shots from Epic's Unreal Engine 3.0!



First- Person Future

Predicting the future is a notoriously tricky business – many have tried and more have failed. You have to be careful what you predict as well. Nostradamus published a few tentative suggestions ('Bernard from Greensand Ridge, your money is behind the fridge'), but about the only specific line of his that ever came true concerned his own death – 'close to bench and bed will I be found dead' – and that's probably the one he wished had exposed him as a charlatan. No matter. I have no fear and am willing to lay my reputation on the line (although I admit I don't do rhyme quite as well as MC Nostra D).

- The FPS – I am proclaiming – will keep the PC at the forefront of gaming.
- What's the PC's next tour de force? Why, the Unreal Engine 3.0 of course.
- Would you like to be enlightened? *F.E.A.R.* will make you very frightened.

I can't think of anything that rhymes with *Brothers In Arms* (and you're probably quite glad about that), but you get the idea. We're dealing with the future of the first-person shooter and we've called it as it's going to happen.

To prove the point, we've managed to scoop exclusive behind-the-scenes access with all of the biggest players. We've spoken to Epic about its next-generation all-purpose engine, travelled to Normandy to talk to Gearbox on the location of its new WWII smash and tracked down the scariest info and shots of the most chilling game since *Sam Fox Strip Poker* – *F.E.A.R.* And there's more...

So, if you want to know what's going to happen before it happens, turn to page 26 and indulge in soothsaying at its very best. Oh, and Bernard, it's not behind the fridge, it's down the back of your sofa...

Dave Woods
Editor



COVER DISCS P120



■ FOUR EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

Ground Control II (multiplayer), *Chaos League* (multiplayer), *RuneScape* and *Knights Of The Temple*. Plus *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, *Joint Operations* and movies from 'The Future of The FPS' feature.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

Free trials of three MMORPGs, including *Anarchy Online*, great footage of *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*, *Rome: Total War*, *The Movies*, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* and more!





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WIN! **TINY COMPO** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (145), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: August 18, 2004. The winner of our July Tiny Compo (143) is Stuart Craig from Motherwell. He knew that David Bowie sang *Ground Control To Major Tom*, and earns a copy of *Warrior Kings: Battles* and a lovely *Painkiller* man-bag.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Dennis or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew! **TEXT COMPETITION ENTRIES:** In order to enter this issue's competitions, you should send the keyword (for example, 'PCZSWITCH'), to 83125, with your full answer, name and address. Misspelt keywords are not counted. All entries for this issue must be received by August 18, 2004. Dennis Publishing will not be liable for any delays in the receipt of any SMS messages as delivery is subject to effective transmission from your network operator. Texts will cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. Upon closure of this issue's comps, Dennis Publishing will have no further obligation thereafter to forward any unread or unsent messages to user or any other party. By replying YES, you agree to receive text messages from PC ZONE and other Dennis Publications regarding future services and promotions, as well as market research run or conducted by Dennis Publishing and other related or associated businesses. You can unsubscribe at any time by replying STOP to any message sent.

**FIRST
Look!**

Football's coming home... definitely

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Euro 2004 may be a bitter memory but the real fun has yet to begin

LOYAL SUPPORTER Steve Hill

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Konami
DEVELOPER Konami
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q4 2004
WEBSITE www.konami.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Latest version of the greatest football game of all time
- New dribbling system
- New free kick and penalty techniques
- Increased passing precision
- On-screen referees

EVERY lunchtime for as long as many of us can remember, the latest incarnation of *Pro Evo* has been feverishly cranked up, with cursing and recriminations proving a major part of the daily schedule. Able to induce fury like no other, everyone has their ready-made excuses, with Woods once going so far as to claim that a goal scored against him was "scripted".

Until last year, to get a game of *Pro Evo* the sage boffins of *PC ZONE* had to endure a visit to console corner, elbowing the drooling children off of their beloved

PS2. That all changed with the inaugural PC release, and we now have our own shiny copies of *PES3*, replete with Clear-O-Vision graphics. We still have to nick the joypads off the console kids, but you can't have everything.

What you can have at the end of this year is *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*, the annual update again pencilled in for the PC (along with the perennial PS2 version plus an Xbox debut). Suffice it to say that a ripple of excitement went around the office on hearing the news.

SEABASS AND CHIPS

Naturally, the question was soon raised of how Konami could improve on perfection. For starters, it could ask commentator Peter Brackley to stop saying "finding it hard to win the aerial battle there" every 30 seconds. And it could shell out the money for proper club and stadium names. It could also tone down the infuriating 'morale' system that occasionally makes it almost impossible

to pass the ball to one of your players after letting in a couple of goals. And of course, the Holy Grail, it could get the bastard playable online.

Unfortunately, we have no information on any of the above, although we will be making hourly calls to

Konami until it spills the beans. What we do know is that the legendary Shingo 'Seabass' Takatsuka and his team are claiming that "*Pro Evolution Soccer 4* marks a quantum leap forward for both the *Pro Evolution* franchise and the football genre as a whole".

MORE MORE MORE

It's a bold claim, but we've been playing the game since the MegaDrive, and amazingly they do get better each time. For *PES4*, we're promised greater speed and control, as well as a wealth of new moves and tricks. As for dead ball situations, new free kick and penalty techniques are being introduced, along with an 'innovative' indirect free kick move.

What's more, the individuality of players is being enhanced, and extended stats will cover such skills as bringing a high or fast ball under control, hitting it first time past an encroaching defender, or flicking it on to a team-mate. A new dribbling system is also being implemented, while crosses and cut-backs will be more precise.

Aesthetic improvements include such subtleties as the appearance of a ref on the pitch, and the fact that kits will become caked in shit as the match progresses. Throw in more teams, an enhanced Master League and a saveable My Best Eleven side, and you could say that we're very excited indeed. [P2]



Italian keeper Buffon doing his best David 'flapper' James impression.

"Aesthetic improvements include the appearance of a ref on the pitch"



The prelude to a clearly disallowed goal...



England versus Portugal? What a match that would be. Bet we'd beat 'em easy...

DOORSTEP CHALLENGE

Kits will no longer be whiter than white, getting progressively dirtier and muddier throughout the match.

DRIBBLE ME THIS

A new dribbling system offers more control as players go one-on-one to try and pass opposing defenders.

WHO'S THE BASTARD IN THE BLACK?

It's the referee, who appears on-screen and even steps in to calm things down when it all goes off.



I'M AN INDIVIDUAL

Individuality is set to be expressed in the way players run, move on and off the ball and how they control it.

LOOKY-LIKEY

Stars will be instantly recognisable thanks to enhanced player likenesses. Beckham's hair will remain a mystery, obviously.

CRIPPLE HIM!

Players can now be forced to retire through severe injury during the course of a Master League season.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN



KILLING MACHINE



■ **NEWS WRITER** Will Porter

▲ In a typical pub conversation the other week (having previously covered my other over-beer classics such as "The time I nearly saw a bear" and "I think you'll find that *Babylon 5* was rather good, actually"), I got to thinking about the exact number of FPS henchmen that I've brutally slaughtered in my gaming career. Seeing as I've played pretty much every major FPS since 1993, some of them multiple times, I was curious as to how many imaginary lives my trigger finger had prematurely curtailed.

Time for a highly scientific investigation. Going from the *ZONE* reviews archive, I estimate that I've played 63 PC first-person shooters in my gaming career. I've also replayed at least 16 of these – making about 79 games-worth of wasted life.

Now, discounting online kills and those re-killed through the power of quicksave (to avoid calculations that are beyond GCSE-level Maths), let's take a guess at the average number of kills per game by looking at the daddy of all shooters: *Doom*. Multiply these 27 levels of hellbound slaughter by the 52 kills in my favourite level (E1M2) and we're well on our way to mathematical success. Still with me?

Extremely roughly, you're looking at 1,404 deaths per game. Ish. That means that the fruits of my gaming career have resulted in the deaths of 110, 916 individual lifetimes. That's the equivalent of me killing every single resident of Ipswich. By the time I've finished playing *Far Cry* for the second time, I'll have wiped out the population of Blackpool. And that's only in the first-person genre – tune in next month and we'll find out which island nations my *Max Payne* habit has decimated...

GET READY FOR KICK-OFF

EIDOS REVEALS DETAILS OF ALL-NEW CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

WITH THE DOMESTIC football season looming into view, the major contenders of the management genre are also preparing for the forthcoming campaign. Traditionally, we'd be predicting another walkover for *Championship Manager*, the series that's dominated the arena for over a decade.

However, the long-time developer of that game, Sports Interactive, has split from publisher Eidos, and is now working on *Football Manager 2005* for Sega. Like Campbell to Arsenal and Figo to Real Madrid, it's a contentious transfer that could well prove fruitful.

Eidos, meanwhile, retains the name *Championship Manager*, and is intent on using it – unsurprising, given that the three fastest-selling games ever in the UK are all iterations of the game. It's also adamant it won't be cheapening the series and that *CM5* will be the best yet.

PUT THE BOOT IN

A bespoke development team – Beautiful Game Studios – has been created in North London, just a few miles from the

CM5 is set to retain the 2D affair, with a tilted perspective that enables managers to better judge the height of the ball.

Furthermore, the 'Action Zone' screen will split the pitch into nine zones as opposed to the previous three, the idea being to provide greater feedback on where the match action is taking place and how possession is being shared.

BRING IN THE EXPERTS

Arguably the weakest area of the entire *CM* series has been the training module, and this is being totally revamped for *CM5* to make it more user-friendly and effective. To this end, Charlton Athletic's first-team coach Mervyn Day has been recruited to act as consultant on the game, helping to expand and develop new training routines.

As for club and player data, with SI retaining its global team of voluntary researchers, *CM5* is employing the services of the Professional Football System, an agency that provides info for clubs around the world, including no less an outfit than Real Madrid.



High fitness? Superb morale? Surely some mistake...



The Premiership, circa 2050?

"With SI retaining the core technology, BGS is starting from scratch – so *CM5* is set to be a brand-new game"

previous home of *Champ Man*. However, with SI retaining the core technology, BGS is starting from scratch, meaning *Champ Man 5* is set to be a brand-new game.

The core values of the series will be preserved though, and fears that Eidos would instigate a flashy but pointless 3D game engine à la *Total Club Manager* have been allayed. Instead,

The bugbear of speed is also being addressed. BGS is intent on making the game quicker, introducing the concept of 'constant gameplay' so you can access all the screens while a match is in progress, which should be a boon to everyone bar tea manufacturers.

We've yet to see *Champ Man 5* in action, but stay tuned for a definitive preview soon.

- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Beautiful Game Studios
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.championshipmanager.co.uk



Hack down Freddie and Bobby and you're sorted.



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Diesel Power

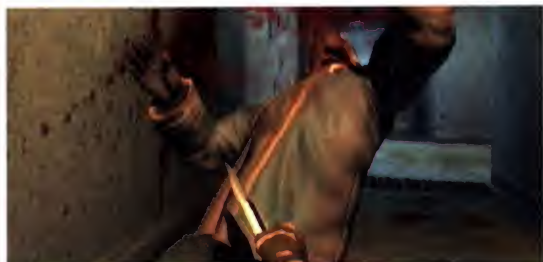
BREAK VIN OUT OF JAIL IN THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

MONOTONE ACTION-MAN Vin Diesel's see-in-the-dark anti-hero is about to get an FPS incarnation on the PC after landing a fair dollop of critical success on the Xbox. Set before both of Riddick's cinematic outings (*Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick*), the game sees the gravel-tongued monolith escaping from the ultra-secure confines of the Butcher Bay prison facility.

The onus of the game is stealth and shadow-play, mixed in with some heavy weaponry and a fair amount of grappling and fisticuffs (made possible since you'll be able to look down and see your own body, Garrett-style). All in all, we'd say it's looking like *Escape From Butcher Bay* has avoided the usual diseased marketing minds that are normally charged with churning out film tie-ins.

Even though Diesel stole two hours of ZONE's life with xXx, we're looking forward to playing through this violent escapade. If he's good enough for Dame Judi Dench, then he's good enough for us.

■ Publisher: VU Games
■ Developer: Starbreeze Studios
■ ETA: TBA
■ Website: www.riddickgame.com



It's mostly hand-to-hand stuff at the start.



The brain scan proved futile.

SPEED DEMON

BREAKNECK THRILLS AND SPILLS AUTHENTICALLY DONE IN GTR

LAST MONTH, ZONE's motoring correspondent Suze Wallace gatecrashed the FIA GT Championship races at Donington Park to check out *GTR* – Swedish developer Simbin's new hyper-realistic driving sim.

While making various engine noises, commenting on exhaust pipes and saying 'farck!' a lot, Suze found the *GTR* stand to be the busiest of the day, with a constant queue of people waiting to sate their driving desires at the wheel of one of the simulators.

Based on the FIA GT series, where heavily tuned high-performance sports cars are put through their paces, our test drive proved the game to be a pretty damn detailed recreation of the insane racing on the Donington track.

With several different modes of simulation, extensive crash damage, taxing opponent AI and some of the most realistic audio we've ever heard in a driving game, this is definitely one for petrol-heads to keep an eye on.

Developer Simbin, whose own CEO, one Henrik Roos is a seasoned GT racer, is currently in talks with UK publishers – so you can expect to be burning rubber by the end of summer. Personally, we can't wait.

■ Publisher: TBA
■ Developer: Simbin
■ ETA: Q3
■ Website: www.simbin.com



Here's Wallace – where's Gromit?



The closest we'll ever get to driving a sports car.

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

Chewing the fat with Epic over a few glasses of wine. The future of gaming is looking pretty rosy.

Our first-person shooter extravaganza – getting the scoop on all the games we're insanely excited about.

Editorial and production finally finding peace with each other through a stirring rendition of the hits of *Les Misérables*.

Porter pushing his 'good boy really' act to its very limits during a night on the tiles in Prague.



BAD COP

Euro 2004 making us all grumpy. Except for art boy Jamie who won the sweepstake with Greece. Bastard.

Tube strike! Wallace's daily commute turning into an epic journey of three-and-a-half hours. Everyone else is late as normal.

Too many of Prez's favourite MMOGs kicking the bucket.

Good Cop: Thompson Bad Cop: Thompson – from Hergé's *The Adventures Of Tin Tin*. Suggested by Helen Inverdale from Gwent. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a PC ZONE goodie bag!



"We're ultimately the ones who made this game even playable. The version that was delivered by Brat was, for the most part, not playable, the balancing practically non-existent and even the textures were unsightly. It's now up to the community to form their own opinion and ascertain that in the long run, it was due only to the massive input from the CDV Breed team that even made it possible to produce a playable action shooter"

Publisher CDV waving its handbag at accusations that its meddling was what made Breed such a turkey.

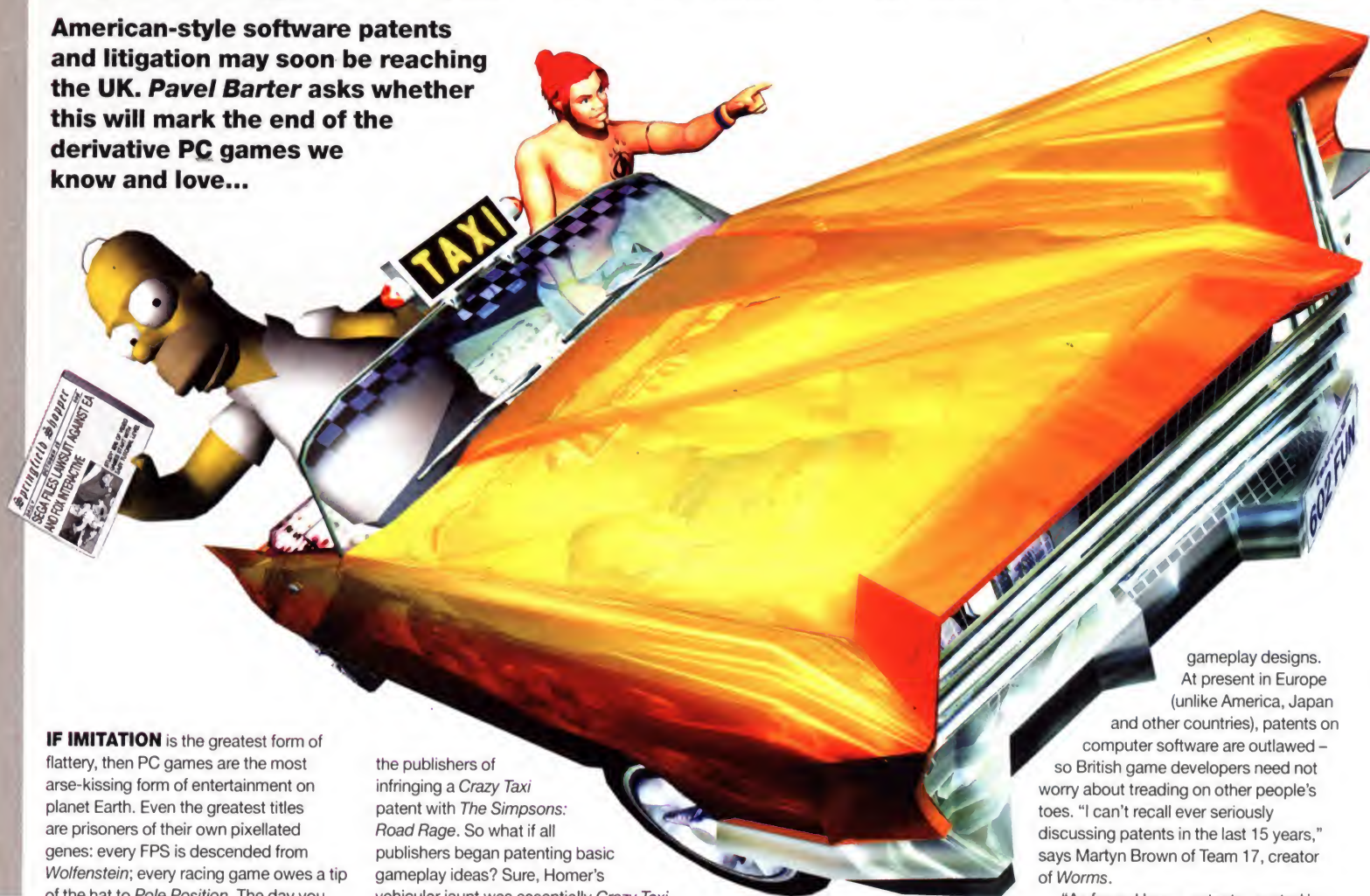
"Right then, shall we all go home? It's half-five and I need to be drunk by eight"

Our glorious leader Dave Woods displaying his devotion to the cause on the night of the vital clash between England and Croatia.

BEGUN THE CLONE WAR HAS...

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

American-style software patents and litigation may soon be reaching the UK. **Pavel Barter** asks whether this will mark the end of the derivative PC games we know and love...



IF IMITATION is the greatest form of flattery, then PC games are the most arse-kissing form of entertainment on planet Earth. Even the greatest titles are prisoners of their own pixelated genes: every FPS is descended from *Wolfenstein*; every racing game owes a tip of the hat to *Pole Position*. The day you play a PC game which hasn't borrowed elements from another is the day you start loudly recommending *Barbie: Race And Ride* to anyone within earshot down the local. But where does a game cross the line between being 'inspired by' another title and simply ripping it off?

In late 2003, Sega filed a lawsuit against EA and Fox Interactive, accusing

the publishers of infringing a *Crazy Taxi* patent with *The Simpsons: Road Rage*. So what if all publishers began patenting basic gameplay ideas? Sure, Homer's vehicular jaunt was essentially *Crazy Taxi* with added yellow, but the cab missions in *GTA3* also bear more than a passing resemblance to Sega's bouncy arcade hit – so couldn't Rockstar come into the firing line as well? Similarly, if *Medal Of Honor* had registered the concept of a WWII shooter, then we might have been denied *Call Of Duty*. Or imagine a terrifying parallel world where the creators of *Army*

Men held the rights to all RTS games. It hardly bears thinking about.

While copyright protects a game's code, its artwork and plot elements, patents exist to protect inventions – not only crackpot stuff like toilet snorkels or 12-gauge golf clubs, but also swanky

gameplay designs. At present in Europe (unlike America, Japan and other countries), patents on computer software are outlawed – so British game developers need not worry about treading on other people's toes. "I can't recall ever seriously discussing patents in the last 15 years," says Martyn Brown of Team 17, creator of *Worms*.

"As far as I know, patents granted in the USA are only enforceable in the USA," adds Stephen Probert, deputy director of The UK Patent Office. "They certainly have no force in the UK (or elsewhere in Europe). So a UK developer will not be liable for infringement of a US patent... It's the person who imports the game into America who's infringing the patent."

COMING YOUR WAY

However, a few weeks ago the European Council approved changes to the EU's Software Patents Directive, paving the way for widespread software patenting in Europe and a blockade on unoriginal (but potentially fun) games.

According to Bradley M Kuhn of America's Free Software Foundation, the UK could soon be in line with the US, where programmers often face a minefield of patents that they may not be aware of.

He comments: "In the videogame industry, this means that someone who codes up a new game from scratch may be infringing on various patents that they may not even know about. Once the game is released, the companies holding



Karate Champ or World Karate Championship? Answers on a postcard.



"Copy my game and I'll rip you a new one..."

"A UK developer will not be liable for infringement of a US patent... It's the person who imports the game into America who's infringed the patent"

STEPHEN PROBERT DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE UK PATENT OFFICE

the patents can then sue the coder out of existence." Scary stuff.

Some game design patents granted in the US are pretty obscure, but others are as familiar as Beyoncé's bum, forcing developers to tread extremely carefully. Anyone intending on making a game with voice recognition, for example, must first seek permission from the independent developer who patented it.

Meanwhile, an RPG patent exists that covers 'scoring based upon goals achieved and subjective elements': a system common in games such as *Neverwinter Nights*, *Morrowind* and nearly every other dice-roller we can think of. Driving game development also has to manoeuvre around registered rights to ghost cars and multiple camera angles, while Nintendo has gone as far as patenting its idea of having 'sanity levels' in survival horror.

MAD WORLD

One of the more bizarre occasions when this litigation stood in the way of our PC pleasures was in 1997, when a legal team contacted Scott Miller of Apogee Software about an alleged infringement.

"An examination of your animated videogames such as *Duke Nukem 3D* indicates that they infringe our client's patent," read the letter. "Since there didn't

appear to be any serious interest in our offer for a licence... We must ask on behalf of our client that you and your enterprises immediately cease and desist from further manufacture, sale and use of such animated videogames."



The patent in question – Video Game with Playback of Live Events – dated back to 1987, and was so broadly defined that it could apply to almost any game title incorporating an FMV sequences, let alone *Duke Nukem*. Miller eventually won the case, although it cost Apogee around \$400,000 in legal fees. Had he lost, the games industry would be a very different world today – almost any title with human animation would have fallen under the sledgehammer of this far-reaching copyright.

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT

This isn't a recent development though – the red tape has been hanging around since the dawn of gaming. In 1964, Sanders Associates cannily patented the very idea of a videogame.

Magnavox bought this registered idea in 1971 and proceeded to sue all other entrants into the field, making extra lolly from selling licences to bigwigs like Atari, Nintendo and Sega. Atari too began patenting left, right and centre: at one stage, it gave Magnavox a taste of its own

medicine and forced the company to pull a *Pac-Man* clone from store shelves.

Stories of copyright and patent game infringements have more twists than fusilli pasta. In 1988, Data East accused Commodore 64 game *Word Karate Championship* of robbing the idea from its 1984 coin-op *Karate Champ*. Admittedly, the similarities between the two were glaring: both were one-on-one karate contests, with similar scoring systems and deformed pixelated judges. Six years later, Data East released a beat 'em up, *Fighter's History*, and was promptly slapped with a lawsuit from Capcom, accusing the company of ripping off *Street Fighter*.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

So are there any benefits to all this lawyer-brandishing? It could be argued that ground-breaking projects like *Half-Life 2* deserve to protect their valuable technologies. In terms of promoting originality and inventiveness, patents are actually in gamers' best interests.

Stephen Probert of The UK Patent Office says: "Game patents are of positive benefit, just as they are (I hope) in other fields of technology. Patents are designed to encourage creativity by protecting the financial and intellectual investment that usually leads to new inventions."

Thankfully, patents are rarely used aggressively. US developers and publishers regularly strike up cross-licensing deals, swapping or buying each other's patents to ensure fab PC gameplay.

Changes to European laws, meanwhile, are "still in draft", according to Roger Bennett, the director general of ELSPA. "While they've been submitted and re-submitted to the European Parliament, there's considerable controversy and doubt about whether they will ever indeed see the light of day as a fully adopted and implemented directive."

Whether patents promote originality or stall creativity is open to question, but UK game developers are under no doubt that these legalities will make their lives tougher. "It will hinder our work without a doubt," says Team 17's Martyn Brown. "I think it's fair to say that much game software 'borrows' ideas from other titles and the current copyright laws don't really adequately protect designs. Patents will just make a very grey area particularly messy." [E]

PERSONAL PATENTS

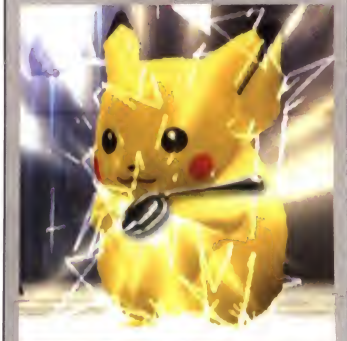
THAT'S YOU THAT IS

As games have become legally (as well as technologically) complex in recent years, numerous narky personalities have dragged developers to court claiming unfair or unapproved portrayal in a game...



TO THE MAX

In July 2003, pro wrestler Darryl Peterson aka Maxx Payne filed a lawsuit against the creators of (yup, you guessed it) *Max Payne*, claiming it stole his identity for the popular bullet-time adventure.



GOTTA BEND 'EM ALL

Spoon-bender Uri Geller tried to sue Nintendo because he thought he looked like an in-game Pokémon character. He said it, not me...



DEEE-SGRACE

Lady Miss Kier of funk group Deee-lite filed a suit against Sega of America, alleging the company styled Ula, *Space Channel 5*'s sexy heroine, after her ultra-diva persona.



Any similarity between the above screenshots is entirely unintentional guvnor. Honest.

EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM OF ME

IT'S TOUGH WORK being a hard-nosed, cutting-edge emulation correspondent. No sooner does Emu Zone confidently state that emulation is usually two generations behind current hardware, than the emu community thumbs its nose at it by producing a limited but working GameCube emulator. Then, as if that wasn't enough, all of a sudden there's Chankast.

Chankast is a Sega Dreamcast emulator – something a lot of emu fans have wanted for a long time, but which there wasn't even a hint or a screenshot of until now. Chankast, however, has come hurtling out of the blocks with high compatibility (via 'ripped' ISO files), full sound and extremely playable speed. At the time of writing it's only two releases old, but already runs dozens of games near-perfectly – and unlike the Gamecube emulator Dolphin, Chankast is equally capable of handling both 2D games and polygon-heavy 3D efforts.

The Dreamcast was probably the last true, old-school games console – by

an arcade in the last seven years or so had a flawless Dreamcast conversion made (understandably, since a lot of the coin-ops were running on the same 'Naomi' hardware anyway). This turned the DC into the ultimate home arcade.

Sega idiotically failed to capitalise on this situation, concentrating instead on the machine's online capabilities and suggesting that you could enjoy online gaming against "six billion players". That is, until it was pointed out that (a) a 56k modem wasn't up to modern online console gaming, (b) the stupid region coding meant you could only play people from three streets away, and (c) there weren't any online-playable games released for the best part of a year after the DC was launched.

But your hard-working, expert reporter's getting off the point. The point is, you can now enjoy the Dreamcast's home-arcade experience on your PC, from the real-world racing thrills of *Metropolis Street Racer* to the brilliant abstract wireframe shoot 'em up *Rez*.

"Almost every game you've seen in an arcade in the last seven years had a flawless Dreamcast conversion made"

which Emu Zone means that it didn't want to be a PC or a set-top box, had no interest in streaming broadband movies, or indeed in anything very much except playing games. This is fairly ironic, however, because it was made with a lot of off-the-shelf PC parts, ran a version of Windows and came with an Internet browser. However, nobody wanted to surf the Web on a 640x480 TV screen, and all of the DC's extra features were more or less ignored from launch.

YOU'RE SO DREAMY

The Dreamcast's existence, however, meant that an unparalleled catalogue of fantastic shallow arcade games (which Emu Zone loves) were thrown into the mix. Almost every game you've seen in

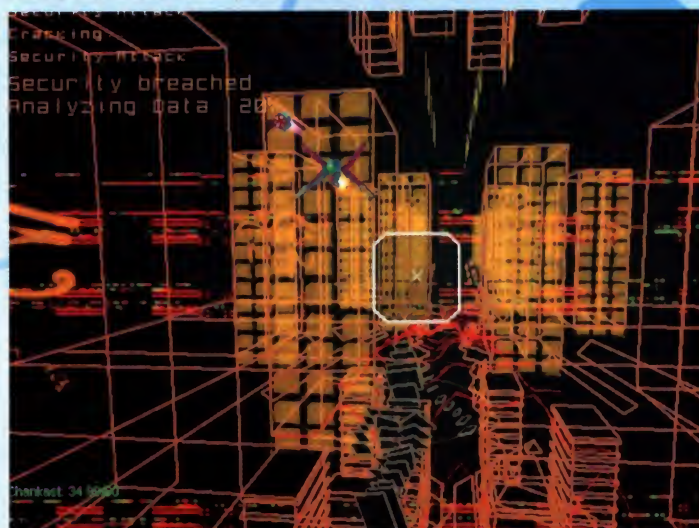
(Neither of which *actually* appeared in arcades, but shut up.) Enjoy it for the remaining month or so before the emulation community brings out a fully-working Xbox 2 emulator a year-and-a-half before the real machine, purely in order to spite me. [X]

LINKS

www.chankast.org/ - Chankast homepage



Metropolis Street Racer gives Emu Zone's foresight a kicking.



Tron-type action in Rez.

EMU
ARCHIVE AT
WWW.EXCELLENTCONTENT.COM/EMUZONE

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The

games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

SOLAR JETMAN (COMMODORE 64, 2004)

Hang on – 2004? Yes indeed. Once again, the world of emulation has triumphed where the commercial games industry let its customers down. In the dying days of the 8-bit home computers, former stalwart Ultimate Play The Game changed its name to Rare and abandoned the home micros in favour of the more

lucrative world of the NES. One of the first games it made for the Nintendo machine was a sequel to Spectrum classics *JetPac* and *Lunar Jetman*. However, rumours persisted for many years that home micro ports for the Speccy, C64, Amiga and Atari ST had been completed, but withheld from release in the light of the decline of the 8-bit markets. (This always struck Emu Zone as bizarre – once the game's made, the costs of releasing it are comparatively trivial. Why not get at least some of your investment back?)

The upshot is that the completed C64 version has finally surfaced and is available for free with the approval of its author (who's also given a brief



interview about it, revealing that Amiga and ST versions were completed too). As a game it's pretty fine, and as an illustration of how software publishers screw over their customers by withholding a perfectly good game in order to make it exclusive to another format at four times the price, it's even better. So thumb your noses at them by playing it, legally, for nothing. Yay!

LINKS

homepage.ntlworld.com/frank.gasking/ – Games That Weren't homepage
www.viceteam.org/ – C64 emulator VICE



Thrust meets Gravitar meets Oids?



Alex Scarpian
Half-creator and founder of Bungie
Studios. Now head of Wideload Games.

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Right now, I'm playing this cool game called *Sapien*. It's kinda challenging and there's no manual, but it has over a year of gameplay.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?

ICO – that's one of the only games I've been able to con my wife into playing with me.

What's your favourite game of all time?

It's got to be *Command & Conquer* – the original computer crack.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Never having a real job.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

I've got to admit, I have a lot of admiration for my team – considering they've (on at least one occasion) sat down and actually listened to my crazy ideas.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

Internet access. Pure and simple.

What's your company's philosophy?

Laughter is the best medicine – and there's a lot of sick people out there.

What's the best thing about your job?

A trained monkey really can do it.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Someone has to clean up after the monkey.

What are you working on at the moment?

This developers' Q&A. (And an action game for the PC and Xbox – Ed.)

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Well, I heard a rumour that Victoria's Secret is getting into the games biz. So I guess that'll be the next two big things.



The future of PC gaming?

ODDS-ON FAVOURITE

GAMBLING AND VIOLENCE TOGETHER AT LAST IN GALLIC SHOOTER *BET ON SOLDIER*

GRAND NATIONAL? Boring.

Greyhounds? Overrated. Watching two roosters with knives attached to their feet ripping flesh off each other's necks?

Peaked. Becoming an active participant in a brutal future sport where you wager money on which of the enemy superstars you're going to gun in the face? Intriguing.

"War is a business for these two corporations who control the world," explains Damien Maurich of Kylotonn Entertainment. "Their war is so popular that they've created these sports, that they call B.O.S. – Bet On Soldier. In these sports you have leagues, and in these leagues you have champions and people bet on these duels between modern gladiators."

B.O.S. manages to merge the spirit of Bitmap Brothers classic *Speedball 2* with your accustomed dose of FPS shootery. There's more than a slight nod to Arnie's activities in *The Running Man* as well, with the storyline putting you in the televised armour of Nolan, an amnesiac with a forgotten past as a B.O.S. champion, who

must pick up his old riot shield and minigun in a quest to discover his fiancé's killer.

Essentially the game boils down into several component parts – before the face-off you're told which other B.O.S. champions will be present in the combat zone, their capabilities and their weak spots. From here, you wager which ones you're likely to bag, and any winnings will be spent on the continued rental of your equipment or some bigger, meatier armaments. Then, as our play with some early preview code showed, you move into your chosen mission. For us, this meant an enjoyable yet linear affair with squad combat mixed in, a few mercenaries hired to help out with the killing of underlings and the exploding of objectives.

When the *B.O.S.* system kicks in, it all gets a bit crazy. A bell rings. You hear your heart beating. The action stops, battling and wounded allies and enemies stand idly by to watch your duel and there are several seconds of inaction while the live TV feed

kicks in. Then the battle begins. You have a minute to knock out your opposing champion and reap the spoils of victory – if you're up to it that is.

"Our idea wasn't just to make another FPS, it was to bring new elements to the genre," continues Damien. "Finding a way to renew gameplay, provide more fun and a better gaming experience for the player. Imagine *B.O.S.* over the internet, with league ladders, world rankings, betting – it all makes a lot of sense in a perpetual worldwide championship. People taking risks, betting that they'll kill other people and improve their ranking".

At the moment *B.O.S.* is certainly an interesting spin on the genre, despite the fact that in all likelihood it won't be up there with the *Far Cry*s of this world. With the going good-to-soft and fair weather, however, we'd certainly punt a few quid on it and expect a return.

■ Publisher: Digital Jesters
■ Developer: Kylotonn Entertainment
■ ETA: Q2 2005
■ Website: www.kylotonn.com/



Eat your heart out William Hill.



Portugal's anti-hooligan stance had gone too far...

Plane Crazy

IL-2 CREATOR LOOKS TO THE PACIFIC

OLEG MADDOX, developer of the classic *IL-2* flight sim series, recently paid a visit to our shores while stopping off at the Blackpool Flight Sim Show. We caught up with the man to whom aviation enthusiasts owe a huge gift of gratitude and grilled him on the upcoming *Pacific Fighters*.

Veterans of the series will naturally be aware that one of the better aspects of the *IL-2* series was its focus on some of the more neglected aircraft of the period. *Pacific Fighters* is no different, bringing a host of previously unseen British, Australian, US and Japanese fighters and

bombers to the party. From the Allied Bristol Beaufighter to the Mitsubishi Betty bomber flown by the Japanese pilots, there's more than enough in the never-before-seen category.

There are also more ground (and sea) objects, including ships, tanks, trains and anti-aircraft gunners. You even get to take off and land while carriers pitch and roll in choppy seas, so pack some travel sickness pills.

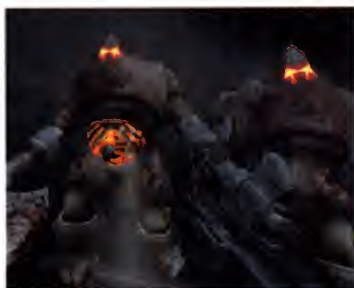
- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: 1C: Maddox Games
- ETA: October 2004
- Website: www.pacific-fighters.com



And who's going to sweep up those bullet casings later, hmm?

HELL FOR LEATHER

RETURN TO THE FRAY IN PAINKILLER EXPANSION BATTLE OUT OF HELL



Will we re-encounter these meanies?



If it moves, kill it. Again.

WE LEFT Daniel Garner cradling his stake-gun and stranded in the bowels of hell – but thankfully the good folk at People Can Fly have decided to let him fight on for another ten levels of chaos in the (presumably Meatloaf-inspired) *Battle Out of Hell* expansion pack.

We gave Adrian Chmielarz, the *Painkiller* project lead, a quick shout and he told us to mentally prepare ourselves – promising that the game will be “even more weird and gory than the original.” With an expanded

array of armaments, a level editor and a host of new multiplayer modes, maps and models (which were pretty lacking in the original) we're expecting good things from a team still buzzing from their recent success. We can't wait – we haven't perforated a zombie in weeks.

- Publisher: Dreamcatcher
- Developer: People Can Fly
- ETA: Summer
- Website: www.peoplecanfly.com

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PC Extreme - July 2004



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Indie Zone

DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

A COUPLE OF months ago, alert readers may recall Indie Zone railing against plagiarism in independently produced PC software. The blatant unacknowledged copying of other people's games is indeed a curse, but that doesn't mean developers

can't take large slices of inspiration from earlier titles. This month, we look at a couple of releases which borrow heavily in one way or another from previous games, but bring more than enough of their own to the table to justify the pinching...

FREE PLAY

Codename: Gordon

Warbeast / X-Tender

"**GORDON FREEMAN**, in the flesh – or, rather, in the two-dimensional platform game. I took the liberty of relieving you of your third dimension. Most of it was government property. As for the suit, I think you've earned it – after all, you'll need it in this Valve-endorsed fan tribute to the upcoming nefariousness I'm planning to unleash in *Half-Life 2*.

"The borderworld, Xen, is in our control, for the time being. But right now, there are a variety of zombies and marines that need battering in the face with crowbars or blowing apart with grenades in 2D docks, beaches and scientific facilities. It's quite a natty piece of work they've managed here – I'm impressed. That's why I'm here, Mr Freeman. I have to recommend your platforming services to my readers, and they may well authorise me to offer you a job. They should agree with me that you have a bit of potential for fun, as well as a tongue-in-cheek approach that'll entertain them in the long, dark months before the *Half-Life 2* release.

"You've proved yourself a decisive man, so I don't expect you'll have any trouble deciding what to do. If you're interested, just log onto Valve's Steam network and click the download button – I'll take that as a yes. Otherwise, well, I can offer you a variety of P2P file systems just brimming with *Codename: Gordon*, as well as a range of illegal pornographic videos and bootleg music. Time to choose... Wisely done, Mr Freeman. I will see you up ahead."

URL www.half-life2d.com

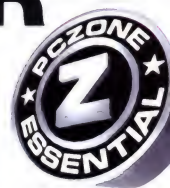


Freeman: silent but violent.



Scrolling shooters are a rarity, unless you're a cunning indie pup that is...

DEMONSTAR SECRET MISSIONS 1



■ \$19.99 (approx £12) | Pub: Mountain King Studios

Dev: Mountain King Studios

www.mking.com/demonstarsm1/index.html

REQUIRES Anything that can handle DirectX 5 DESIRES That'll just about do it...

Stuart Campbell relives the days when games were horizontal, vertical or nothing at all..

SEIBU KAIHATSU'S 1990 coin-op *Raiden* is one of the most influential arcade games of all time. Many games have paid homage to it in the last 14 years, and most scrolling shoot 'em ups can trace their history back to it in greater or lesser part, but never has closer tribute been paid than in Mountain King's *Demonstar* series (of which *Secret Missions 1* is the second instalment). Indeed, the game lifts the design of the *Raiden* spaceship and the taking-off-from-the-carrier-deck intro to each level almost pixel-for-pixel; but aside from such superficial nods to its inspiration (and the odd glance back at Amiga favourite *SWIV*), this is a game that follows the *Raiden* design template to a degree that verges on stalking. Although admittedly all the game's eight actual stages are entirely new (and the graphics are somewhat sharper and lusher than *Raiden* ever managed).

What that means in practice is a tough, well-balanced, no-nonsense 'shmup' that you can devote the odd blissful, brainless half-hour to for a straightforward but demanding test of your joypad skills. Some slightly suspect use of colour causes enemy bullets to sometimes get lost in the on-screen mayhem (the game's one noticeable flaw), but it's still a challenge that you keep coming back to – because the only Continue option puts you all the way back to the start of the last stage you reached.

There's no lazy quicksaving your way through games like *Demonstar*, and you clearly don't have the pump-more-cash-in option of playing *Raiden* in the arcade. To see the end of this, you just have to plain old-fashioned earn it. This reviewer hopes that's not enough to put the modern PC gamer off it altogether.

PCZONE VERDICT 82

What are you, scared?

147 in 5_{min} 20_{secs}

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"So convincing you might have to check the television hasn't turned itself over to BBC 2" Official Xbox Mag

"The most realistic snooker simulation ever" P2 Magazine



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www.codemasters.co.uk/snooker2004



PlayStation®2



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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A 15-YEAR-OLD girl's heart stopped beating while she played an arcade game. American **Kimber Wilson** suffered the cardiac arrest in an arcade in Bellevue, USA while enjoying a bout of **Dance Dance Revolution**, known in the UK as **Dancing Stage**. Wilson collapsed in a twitching heap, but was fortunately resuscitated by arcade owners and police using **CPR**. Paramedics were able to restart her heart using a **defibrillator** and she later recovered in hospital. Experts have claimed that the fact she was playing the high-tempo game was merely a coincidence and that the near-tragedy could have struck at any time, due to a condition known as **hypertrophic cardiomyopathy** which involves over-thick heart walls. Her father Eddie boomed: "You could be asleep, walking, running, sitting down to eat – it can hit ya." Now fitted with a **pacemaker** and reliant on medication to live, Wilson pondered her future visits to the arcade, saying: "I might try **Dance Dance Revolution**, but I'm thinking no."

The inaugural **Splinter Cell: Monkey Bar Challenge** has taken place in Battersea Park Children's Zoo, London, resulting in a **Guinness World Record** for a team of three British challengers, smashing the previously French-held time. **Ubisoft UK** marketing director **John Parkes** blurted: "I doubt that even Sam Fisher could have been able to go any faster than today's **Splinter Cell: Monkey Bar Challenge** world record breakers. They all gave 110 per cent and by supporting the **NSPCC** have raised funds for a worthy cause. Every one of them is a true hero in attempting this great world record-breaking feat." The category for **World's Most Tenuous PR Stunt** is believed to be under consideration.

Following arrests in the **Half-Life 2** source code theft case, a further game robbery has come to light. A gold disc of **Slitherine Software's** forthcoming standalone Spartan expansion pack **Gates Of Troy** was stolen when a postman was mugged in Epsom. A spokesman said: "It is hoped that it was a random attack and the thieves do not realise what they have or if they do, that they will not have the knowledge and ability to make any use of it." Every chance.

"A gold disc with the source code for Gates Of Troy was stolen when a postman was mugged in Epsom"

ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN



RADIATION LEAK

ZONE has been digging around the crater left by the collapse of Interplay and gleaned some info on the in-hiatus **Fallout 3** project.



It was due to be set ten years after **Fallout 2**, with 16 gameplay hubs, five types of vehicles and interestingly, the storyline would have you meet up with a lady called Kuritsu – the kidnapped sister of Sulick, the crazy Tribal from **Fallout 2**. Stricken publisher

Interplay has also mooted the idea of a **Fallout** MMOG in its death throes. We'll believe it when we see it...



STOLE MY HEART

Whereas most crimes involve handbags, violence and drug habits, some involve super-sexy, technologically aware women who infiltrate high-security compounds to procure priceless items. And it's the latter, rarer, variety that **Blue52** is aiming for with **Stolen**. Out in March next year, it's clear that the legacy of **Lara** hasn't been shaken off just yet.



BIO-MOD SQUAD

Last month we dished up the scoop on **Snowblind**, from Crystal Dynamics. It's now emerged that the futuristic shooter originally started out as a **Deus Ex** spin-off entitled **Deus Ex: Clan Wars**. This makes sense when you take into account the gadgetry and bio-modding that'll feature in **Snowblind** – and also clicks with the rumours that **Deus Ex** creator **Warren Spector** has taken up an advisory role on the new Crystal Dynamics' take on **Tomb Raider**.



AREN'T WE KIND?

We've been a bit lax in reporting compo winners of late, so here's the motherload. The lucky **X2 Alienware** rig winner was **P Wright** from Norwich, while **Richard Law**, **Sander Zuiderduin**, **Emma Wade**, **Derek Harrison**, **Malcolm Lock**, **J Caldwell**, **Brant Hickman**, **Pennie Wilson** and **Jamie Baxter** all won copies of the game. The **Vietcong** camouflaged machine was won by **Cliff Johnson** from Hornchurch, while game winners were **John McHugh**, **Matthew Conway**, **Chris Sharp**, **Dan Morrison** and **David Walsh**. Finally, **kill.switch** card winners were **Mark Lamb**, **Andrew Findlater** and **Sebastian Krzyzewski**. Phew!

On The Right Track

EYE-MELTING REVAMP IN RACE-PUZZLER **TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE**

IT'S SLICK, it's cool, it's nobody's fool... It's **TrackMania: Sunrise** – the finger-mashing Gallic puzzle-racer reborn. The cars are faster and the graphics are flashier, but the integral puzzles, track-building and manic leaping are still very much apparent. **ZONE** was dumbstruck when it saw what was on offer in **Sunrise**, and if you're a closet **TrackManiac** yourself, then check out the video on our DVD. It's hard to believe that a game that looked so rough around the edges when we reviewed it in February has become so flash in such little time, and we wish the clever chaps at Nadeo every success with it.

■ Publisher: Digital Jesters ■ Developer: Nadeo
■ ETA: Q3 ■ Website: www.trackmaniagame.com



But where are the crap shadows and dodgy trucks?

WIN!

TRACKMANIA POWER UP! GIVEAWAY

MISSED OUT ON THE ORIGINAL? WE'VE GOT 20 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

We've secured 20 whole copies of the latest edition of the original race/puzzle/construct 'em up. If you fancy winning one of them, just answer the following question:

Which of these games isn't a product of a France?

A: Little Big Adventure
B: Beyond Good & Evil
C: Deer Hunter 2004

Answers on a postcard to:
TrackMania Compo,
PC ZONE,
Dennis Publishing,
9 Dallington Street,
London,
EC1V 0BQ.

Or if you want to enter by text then simply send 'PCZTRACK' to 83125, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name and address. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

For full terms and conditions see page 7. All entries must be received by August 18.



Search For a Game

Got the greatest game idea since *Doom*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – PC ZONE's Search For A Game...



Here we go again! Yes ladies and gentlemen, it's that time of the month again. Time for one brave soul to enter the spotlight of apprehension, grasp the microphone of trepidation and brave the judging panel of inevitability as we continue our search for the gaming stars of tomorrow. This month, it's **Michael J Dowswell** of *New Galloway*, who presents the retro-future stylings of a game he oddly describes as...

"Mafia meets Splinter Cell in a retro style"



ROCKETMAN CHRONICLES

THE GAMEWORLD is around the same size as *Mafia*'s world, a big city that has public transport above, underground, at harbours and airports. There are walk-in buildings (library, museum, cathedrals) and streets are busy with traffic and plenty of character animation. Gameplay is from a *Mafia*-style third-person view with the ability to jump into any vehicle. The character would fire hi-tech, but still fairly conventional guns, along with blaster-style types of weapons as well.

The game would be mission-based, with a story arc that develops through 20 missions. Your character would also swap over to other characters for variation in certain missions. All characters would have sneak, walk and run modes and can hide in shadowy areas.

An example of a mission: Larry's top man, Barry, has been badly treating robots at his hideout on the south island of Robot City. You must infiltrate Barry's base by using 'Lucy'. Lucy is a robot child who can crawl through



Rocketman Chronicles uses a *Mafia*-style city network.

an air vent located outside Barry's, sneak inside and plant explosive charges at the main entrance. Assassinate Barry, find and release the 15 robot slaves and drive them to a secure location. This involves driving to Baker Street car park and collecting a truck; picking up Lucy across the street; driving to Barry's; controlling Lucy and setting the charges without being seen by the guards; entering the building and taking out Barry and his thugs; freeing the robot slaves and escorting them back to the truck.



Michael provided some evocative artwork of his own.



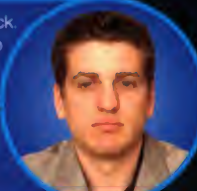
In-game missions would have a *Splinter Cell* stealth-like feel.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY



"There's nothing particularly original about the game design and to make matters worse your pitch sounds really cartoony. You make it sound like a *GTA* clone for kids which meant I was hurtling towards a big fat miss until I saw your evocative artwork, which sits at odds with almost everything else you've provided. It's really important to play on your strengths and work any original angle, so I'd concentrate on the backdrop, the relationship between the humans and the robots and work from there. It could be big." **Verdict: HIT!**

"*Mafia* with robots? And token stealth bits? What an absolute crock. It's the classic mistake of taking all your favourite games and trying to screw them together into an unholy hybrid mess. Admittedly, your artwork is nice, evoking a beautiful yet sterile future where downtrodden robots strive to prove their humanity. But even there, the character you've depicted is little more than a robotic stick figure, with close to zero player appeal or explanatory background. And sadly, there's no game here at all." **Verdict: MISS!**



"I've been completely won over by your artwork – it's quite brilliant. It certainly looks a little like the new Will Smith *I, Robot* flick, but contained within a free-roaming city it could make a great template for a free-roaming game. The potential for *Blade Runner*-style human vs robot paranoia is there as well, and if you're a member of some sort of robot freedom-fighting group then all the better. I doubt it would shift as many units as a pimp-beater like *GTA*, but for sheer artsy class I reckon it could be winner." **Verdict: HIT!**



"Two to one in favour means *Rocketman Chronicles* is a winner with us. Well done Michael! We'll be back next month with another eager young wannabe. See ya!"

Send your ideas in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to 'Search For A Game' at the usual address.

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Forget your music charts, your bar charts and your Ten Most Wanted. Here are the only charts that matter. The ones with *The Sims* in...



TOP 10




Probably hitting the heights due to a recent football extravaganza we'd all like to consign to history (well, those among us who are of the English persuasion anyway), *Champ Man* rules the roost once more. We're sick of it ourselves. For the time being.



This is *PC ZONE* to *Ground Control II*, you're floating in a most peculiar way at number three. You've really made the grade you know; strategy looks very different today and, even though a few AI circuits might be dead, there's not very much wrong with you at all.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	CHAMP MAN: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
2	NEW JOINT OPS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC	83%
3	NEW GROUND CONTROL II	VU GAMES	84%
4	NEW THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS	85%
5	NEW HARRY POTTER: PRISONER OF AZKABAN	EA	68%
6	▼ FAR CRY	UBISOFT	93%
7	▼ CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT	60%
8	NEW THE SIMS: TRIPLE DELUXE	EA	N/A
9	▼ THE SIMS	EA	86%
10	NEW SHREK 2	ACTIVISION	N/A



The shooter that's officially flavour of the *ZONE* team's online month crash-lands a helicopter and claims itself an impressive spawn point on an island chain at number two. Novologic with a game that we all truly enjoy? What will they think of next?



We all love *Harry Potter* here at *PC ZONE*. Or at least the people who matter at *PC ZONE* love *Harry Potter* – so we're all a-tizzy that it's hit number five. The muggle populace has spoken! We're off for a butter beer and a packet of magic beans to celebrate.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Has anyone seen *Singles – Flirt Up Your Life*? It stayed around for a while but now it's gone. And it promised to call. I feel so used.
DavidMc555

Thank god *CSI* is going six feet under – it had me worried for a bit! Beware the power of bored housewives.
Rich

CSI has gone right down from number one to number seven. Could it be that the gaming public out there are finally beginning to take into account the wisdom and expertise of games journalists? (*Slurp! Slurp! Kiss!*)
Thunder_Taker



megastores

TOP 10

1.	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS
2.	PERIMETER	CODEMASTERS
3.	FAR CRY	UBISOFT
4.	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT
5.	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS
6.	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
7.	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
8.	RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	MICROSOFT
9.	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
10.	UEFA EURO 2004	EA

COMPETITION



megastores

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Garrett, the sneaky tea-leaf in *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, has which prosthetic body part?

A Wooden arm **B** Metal eye **C** Silver spleen

Send your answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 145, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: August 18, 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

To enter the competition by text: send PCZVIRGIN, to 83125, with your answer (a,b, or c), plus your full name and address.

- All text entries must be received by August 18. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE COMING MONTHS. THESE ARE ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES, CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

AUGUST

AIRBORNE TROOPS	GMX MEDIA
CATWOMAN	EA
CHAOS LEAGUE	DIGITAL JESTERS
D-DAY	DIGITAL JESTERS
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004	JALECO

SEPTEMBER

CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
KNIGHTS OF HONOR	SUNFLOWERS/EA
LULA 3D	CDV
JUICED	ACCLAIM
PORT ROYALE 2	ASCARON
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	KONAMI
SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
TOP SPIN	ATARI
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ

Q3

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: SABRE SQUADRON	GATHERING
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
THE SIMS 2	EA
TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE	DIGITAL JESTERS
SNOWBLIND	EIDOS
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS

OCTOBER

BLOODRAYNE 2	MAJESCO
BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT	HD INTERACTIVE
PACIFIC FIGHTERS	UBISOFT
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
VIVISECTOR	BRIGADES

Q4

BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GATHERING
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
PARIAH	HIP GAMES
PRINCE OF PERSIA 2	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4	KONAMI
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
SPLINTER CELL 3	UBISOFT
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

TBA 2004

HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION

2005

BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
SWAT 4	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67

It's finished, but you won't be playing it till September. Why? Well it seems that Eidos reckons it'll make a bit more cash if the Vietnam shooter isn't released in the early summer gaming hinterland. Don't be too sad though, we'll have a full review of the shock and gore shooter next issue.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Guerrilla Games
- ETA: September
- Website: www.eidos.co.uk/gss/shellshock/



REPUBLIC COMMANDO



Just when you get a whiff of another decent *Star Wars* game it bolts for cover like an exposed womp-rat in Beggars Canyon. Early 2005 is the carrot being dangled by Activision, so we'll have to wait for our moment of Clone War squad shootery for a few more par-secs.

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: Lucasarts
- ETA: Early 2005
- Website: www.lucasarts.com

BLACK9

With the demise of *Starfleet Command* developer Taldren comes the final rusty nail in the coffin for the troubled *Black9*. We reported that the game was 'on hold' a few months back, but it turns out that there were never any real plans to resuscitate the project: it was all a bluff created by the clever use of smoke and mirrors.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Taldren
- ETA: KIA



TOP 10 GAME CHARACTERS YOU MOST WANT TO HURT

1. **KYLE KATARN** (STUPID, IRRITATING, BEARDED JEDI MASTER)
2. **ROSH PENIN** (STUPID, IRRITATING, NO-BEARD JEDI APPRENTICE)
3. **BASTILA SHAN** (KOTOR JEDI WHO NEVER SHUTS UP)
4. **SCOTTY** (TOCA SIDEKICK AND DRUNKEN STEREOTYPE)
5. **COMMANDER GUY IN BREED** (WORST VOICE-ACTING EVER... EVER)
6. **NICK KANG** (TRUE CRIME'S PRIMARY TRUE CRIME)
7. **GEORGE STOBART** (BROKEN SWORD'S BUMBLING FOOL)
8. **WILLIAM DRAKE** (HATEFUL AQUANOX 2 GUY - STOP TALKING!)
9. **VOYAGER TIT** (SARCASTIC TWAT OF A CREWMAN IN ELITE FORCE)
10. **THE SIMS** (ALL OF THEM)

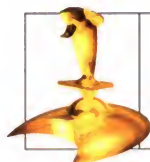
IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A PCZ GOODIE BAG!

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS 2004

They're back! Bigger and better than ever and you get to choose the winners...

FORGET THE OSCARS. Laugh in the face of the BRITs. The UK's biggest awards ceremony is back and it wants your votes! Last year, *Championship Manager* took the PC game of the year, ahead of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Battlefield 1942*, but who's going to be the daddy in 2004? *Far Cry*? *Doom 3*? *Deus Ex: Invisible War* or *UT2004*?

It's up to you, because The Golden Joysticks can't be bought and, for once, the corporate fat cats don't get a say – your votes decide the winners. Vote for your favourite games online and you'll be entered into a prize draw to attend the glitzy bash on November 5, where you can spot the stars and live it up in style. What are you waiting for?



THE
GOLDEN
JOYSTICK
AWARDS™

ESTABLISHED 1992

IN ASSOCIATION WITH **PCZONE**

SPONSORED BY



THE CATEGORIES

- PC GAME OF THE YEAR
- ONLINE GAME OF THE YEAR
- PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR
(SPONSORED BY MACROVISION)
- RETAILER OF THE YEAR
(SPONSORED BY ELECTRONIC ARTS)
- HARDWARE OF THE YEAR
- MOST WANTED GAME FOR CHRISTMAS
- MOST ANTICIPATED GAME FOR 2005
- UNSUNG HERO GAME OF THE YEAR
- ULTIMATE GAME OF THE YEAR
(ALL PLATFORMS)

WHY? HOW? WHAT?

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PC ZONE TEAM

Why should you vote? It's simple – we love games and you love games. That's why we get together every issue for a squelchy love-in. But when do you ever get the chance to tell the whole world how you feel? That's the sole purpose of The Golden Joysticks, the biggest and most prestigious gaming awards known to humanity. Each and every year, millions gather to celebrate the best games in the world and it's your voice that can make a difference.

Spoilt for choice? What about *Far Cry*? The game that crept out of a deep blue sea and blew the socks off an unsuspecting Will Porter. He hasn't been the same since. Nor has Anthony Holden for that matter. Or *Unreal Tournament 2004*? The game that's taken me off the mag and onto the Internet since Christmas. Then there's the unsung PC heroes – the games that should have made a mark but didn't. Games like *Paul Presley's X2* (its official name in the ZONE office); *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* (the brilliant platformer that stole Suzy's heart – she wants it back btw); and Codemaster's *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II*. These are only suggestions though – feel free to ignore us and vote for your favourite game of the year. We won't be hurt – these are your awards after all.

And it couldn't be any easier. Just go to www.goldenjoystick.co.uk and register immediately. And because The Golden Joysticks love all platforms, you can vote for your favourite console games as well. You can side with any game you like, as long as it was released in the UK between November 14, 2003 and October 29, 2004 – with the exception of Most Wanted Game For Christmas and Most Anticipated Game for 2005. A full list is waiting for you online. See you there...



Dave Woods
Editor

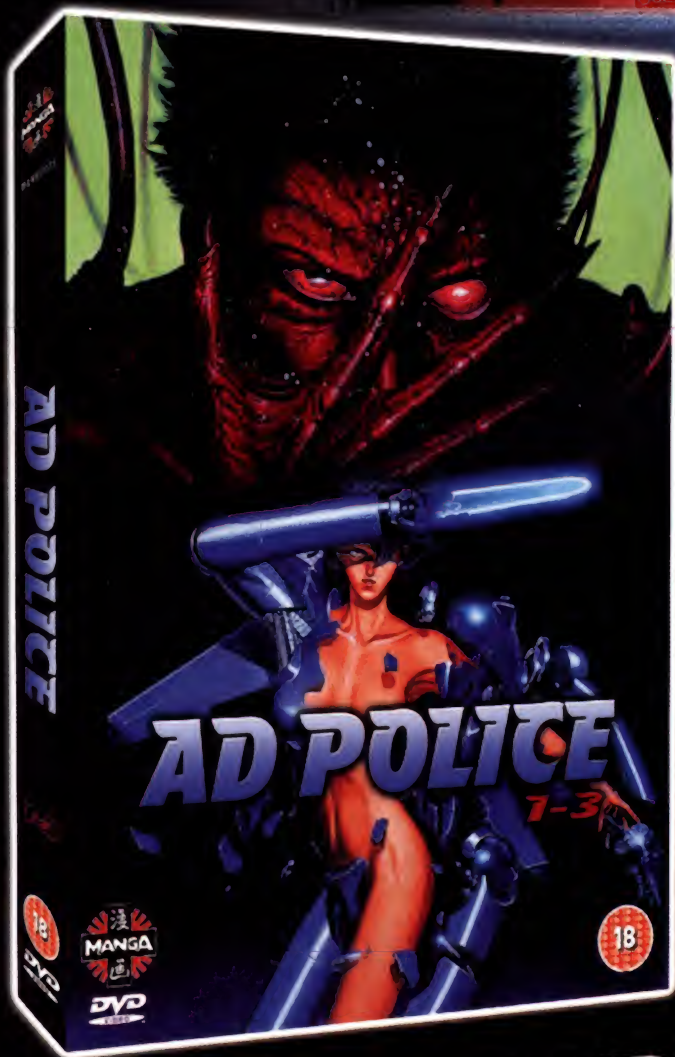


GAMEZVILLE

The winners will be announced on November 5, 2004. If you don't win the prize draw to attend the ceremony in person, you can watch the action unfold on Gamezville.

AD POLICE

1-3



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whatever turns you on!



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THE FUTURE OF THE FPS

The hottest games, the hottest engine, the hottest previews. We take an exhaustive look at the shooters of tomorrow – today

THE EXACT origin of the FPS is a tricky one to pin down. Some say it began in the 1980s behind the Iron Curtain at the heart of the Cold War, with one Anton Shootovich, a decryption programmer in the political wing of the Kremlin holding the rank of First People's Commissar, developing a simple little time-waster during lunch hour. The code was accidentally stolen by a deep-cover CIA operative, mistaking it for Comrade Andropov's credit card details, smuggled out to the West and eventually landing in the hands of three enterprising teenagers at MIT. They enhanced the code, added basic 3D graphics and mistranslated the title as 'First-Person Shooter's Game'.

Others claim that's a load of bollocks and that the genre began in earnest with an '80s shareware program on early IBM PC machines called *Wolfenstein 3D*, in which crudely pixellated Nazis tried to kill an American GI in a gothic castle, ending with a one-on-one encounter with Mecha-Hitler. Movement was restricted to forwards, backwards, left and right, and you couldn't look up or down. That milestone didn't arrive until *Dark Forces* some three years later, with complete 3D debuting in the seminal *Quake* a year after that – although vertical movement was touched upon by classics such as *Descent*, *Magic Carpet* and the RPG legend that was *Ultima Underworld*.

ION TOMORROW

Regardless of which origin you put your faith in, the first-person shooter technology has evolved beyond all recognition in the last decade, at a speed that makes a mockery of any Moore's Law interpretation that can be applied to gaming development. Case in point – Epic's Unreal Engine 3.0 is already so many light years beyond the previous incarnation, games developers can only use it by looking through high-powered radar telescopes atop mountains in Peru. Or something.

Over the page we begin our look at the future of the first-person shooter, or at least the immediate future. These are the games you can expect to be causing divorces, exam failures, job losses and outraged tabloid headlines over the next few years. We start with the most in-depth analysis anywhere of Epic's technological marvel, the engine that will lead the genre to new heights.

Don't believe us? At the recent public unveiling at E3, even the likes of Warren 'Deus Ex' Spector was seen by ZONE's own spies sitting quietly at the back of a demonstration, feverishly making notes and muttering into his beard like a crazy game-making Rasputin. Imagine that little scenario if you will. One of the greatest game designers in the world today finally getting an engine that can do his ideas justice. No more half-hearted Xbox ports and frustrating limitations hinting at what could have been.

Epic's monster is just the tip of this particular iceberg. There are still the likes of *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine, the new *Doom* code, rumours of Havok 3 being in the works and more proprietary single-game engines than you can mention. All

bring ground-breaking developments in the realms of eye candy, all promise to be capable of providing the most immersive, realistic gaming experiences ever seen (with perhaps the exception of the *Serious Sam 2* engine).

COMING SOON

But then they would, wouldn't they? The real questions are what do we, the gamers on the street, want from our games of tomorrow and how closely are these technological miracles mirroring those needs? Throughout this look at the future of god's own gaming genre, we'll be answering those very questions, taking in all aspects of the shooter, from storylines to physics. From the quality of AI to the hardware you'll be needing to run the damn things at anything above one-frame-per-hour. And naturally, you'll be finding out everything you could ever need to know about the key games in those fields.

How *Star Wars Battlefront* is not only giving the online world a *Star Wars* game it actually wants to play, but it's also finally creating a *Star Wars* game that really captures the spirit of the film's epic battles (minus any yipping toddlers or crazy-eared Rastafarian knock-offs).

How *Brothers In Arms* is taking the shock tactics of *Call Of Duty* and *Medal Of Honor*, while adding real tactics to up the feeling of leading a squad of teenagers to their death in war-torn France.

How *F.E.A.R.* is finally taking the little-girls-are-scary dynamic from the medium of film and showing how to do it properly in a game. Along with adding so much viscera even Quentin Tarantino would chuck his lunch.

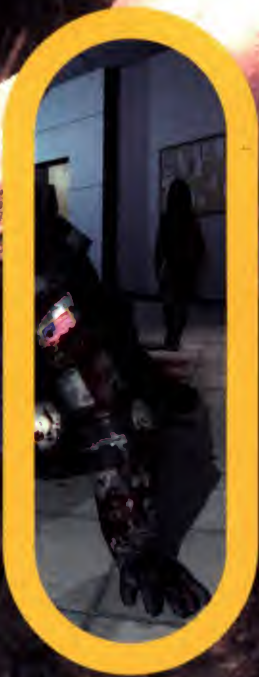
How *Stalker* is experimenting with AI so intelligent and so capable of making believable decisions independently of your actions that there's precious little need to even install the game as the bots are quite happy to play the thing without you even being there.

TOYS FOR THE BOYS

Ultimately, everything comes back to the engines. Anyone can make predictions about what the future holds, most of which boil down to little more than listing the obvious. Photo-realism, ultra-realistic physics, so many more polygons piled on top of each other that the German gaming press explode in an orgasmic high. Techno marvels such as Unreal Engine 3.0 are not only capable of giving development teams the tools to make their games do anything imaginable, but also eliminate the need for lengthy design time that would only result in inferior ways of rotating coloured lights around the screen anyway.

About the only thing us commentators can stroke our beards towards with any degree of confidence is that shooters will be incorporating more elements of every other genre – just take a look at the RTS mode in *Brothers In Arms*. These games will be providing every possible experience you can hope for. Except any involving *Duke Nukem Forever*. [PC]

"The real question is how closely do technological miracles mirror gamers' needs?"





Look! This is what games are going to be like in two years!

UNREAL: THE NEXT GENERATION

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Epic Games

PUBLISHER TBC

WEBSITE

www.unrealtechnology.com

ETA 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The next generation of graphics revealed
- Incredible rendering detail
- Awesome new physics capabilities
- Amazing ease of use for developers and modders

The future is now! Epic gives us a glimpse of the games of 2006 with the first in-depth look at Unreal Engine 3.0. *Anthony Holden* gapes in wonderment

2006 sounds like science fiction. It sounds like a world of whizzing hover-cars and shiny silver jumpsuits, of erotic robots and punctual, air-conditioned British trains (*Witchcraft! -Ed*). But brace yourselves for a shock, because 2006 is in fact a mere 18 months away and, the occasional ill-advised shellsuit notwithstanding, you're not going to see any of those things.

How do we know? Because we've just been given our first real glimpse of the future by the people who're busy making it – Epic Games, creator of the world-beating *Unreal* and *UT* franchises.

But while the lack of a *Jetsons*-esque world of tomorrow is a tad disappointing, there is good news: the PC games of

tomorrow look phenomenally, heart-stoppingly gorgeous. While the rest of the world has been hanging around waiting to play *Half-Life 2*, Epic has taken the next step, creating an engine for a new era of PC gaming. And if what we've seen is anything to go by, it's going to be a golden age indeed.

NOT OLD, BORROWED OR BLUE

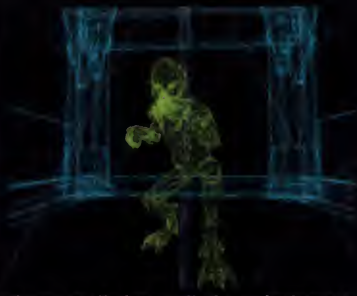
"The Unreal Engine 3.0 has been redesigned from the ground up for DirectX 9 and next generation consoles," says Tim Sweeney, celebrated code boffin and programmer at Epic. "We have a 100 per cent new renderer, new sound system, new physics system, new particle system, new terrain system, new animation system. Basically, if you can see it, we've rewritten it completely."

Right now, there's nothing else out there that comes close. As Tim points out, other engines – including *Doom 3* and *Source* – are still very much hybrid solutions, compromises designed to support DirectX 7, 8 and 9 at various levels. "We've been able to do a lot more by focusing on a single target," says Tim. "We're only just at a point where this engine will run decently – NVIDIA's GeForce 6800 is the first card that lets us

show it as it was designed to be shown." And the results, according to Tim, are a tenfold increase in visual quality over *UT2004*. Now, pardon my 133t but: holy sh1t!

If that sounds far-fetched, just take a look at these screenshots, mostly taken by us while we played around with the engine. Despite what you may be thinking, they're all 100 per cent in-game (including the one on the cover) and running on consumer hardware. Running at fairly decent frame-rates too – though this is set to double as soon as NVIDIA's latest SLI feature comes into play (which enables you to run two or more 6800s in parallel).

And honestly, we can't say enough how amazing it looks (especially in motion, as you'll see on next month's



Epic demonstrates how much detail can easily be applied to wireframes.



Nice teeth! Game characters have come a long way since Pac-Man.

PC ZONE cover discs). The level of detail is phenomenal – thanks not only to a massive poly-count but also to a variety of graphical tricks such as virtual displacement mapping (which gives the illusion of shape and contour where none exists architecturally), realistic skin diffraction and a lovely new soft shadowing technique.

In fact, the only thing we can't confirm is what the hell the game *is*, as Epic is keeping resolutely tight-lipped on this matter. All it'd tell us was that all the environments and creatures you see here are indeed from a 'new action game', not connected with the *Unreal* series but part of a secret new franchise coming to PC and next-gen consoles in early 2006. "We don't waste much time making stuff purely for demo purposes,"

winks Epic vice president Mark Rein.

From what we've seen, however, it's clearly a shooter of some variety – probably not a pure FPS, but following some pretty familiar themes. You've got massive outdoor and indoor environments, a variety of unpleasant reptilian enemies (known as the Geist), and a human protagonist from some sort of futuristic military organisation called the CDU. Or at least, that's how it looked to us – all we know for sure is that it's the most gorgeous game of all time.

ANYTHING GOES

However, it's only because Epic is a shooter developer at heart that the game is a shooter at all, and the lads are keen to point out that you can make any game you want with UE3.0. Indeed, aside from

the rendering and the physics, the broad support for different genres is perhaps the most impressive thing about the new tech.

Tim Sweeney explains: "The first-generation Unreal engine was very much an FPS engine, developed for a very narrow set of games. With Unreal Engine 2.0, there's already been massively multiplayer games, a pinball game, first- and third-person games in a lot of different genres. Now, engines are finally at a point where you can develop pretty much anything: a shooter, a car racing game, sports games, RPGs..."

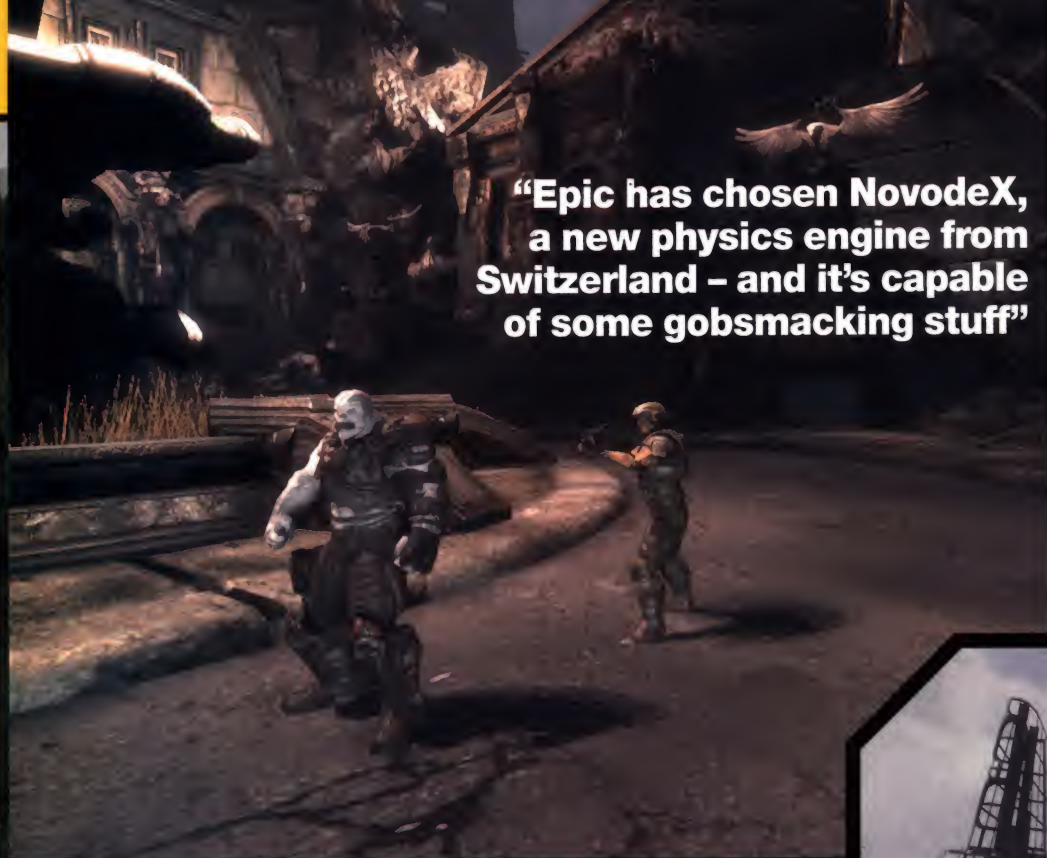
"You can already see it in some of the *UT2004* mods," chips in Mark Rein. "People have done *Marble Madness* games, golf games, *Xenious*-style games. There's going to be some real

"The Unreal Engine 3.0 has been redesigned from the ground up. If you can see it, we've rewritten it completely"

TIM SWEENEY
CODER/PROGRAMMER, EPIC



"Epic has chosen NovodeX, a new physics engine from Switzerland – and it's capable of some gobsmacking stuff"



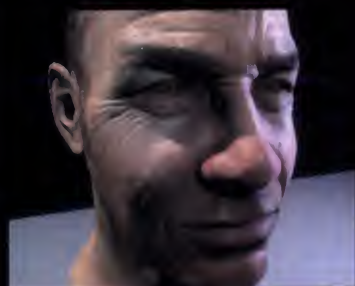
"Don't move – I have you partially surrounded."

surprising stuff with UE3.0. We've already got some licensees doing pretty interesting things."

BACK TO NATURE

Part of what makes the engine so generalised is that it is, in a way, truer to reality than any technology before it. The way light and sound behave, the way materials work, the way the laws of physics operate – they're all tangibly closer to how things work in the natural world.

Take the new Light Transmission technique, for example. Proving hugely effective in removing that 'plastic' quality that you see on the faces of current-gen game characters, it's an innovation based precisely on how light operates in real life – penetrating the skin and diffusing to some degree, rather than just bouncing off like a cue-ball.



Before and after: the new Light Transmission mask brings characters to life.

However, even more compelling examples come from the engine's physics capabilities.

"When we implement a vehicle now," explains Tim Sweeney, "we don't hard-code how the vehicle should respond to the environment. We just build a physical object, we put in springs for the shock absorbers, add dampers and so on. So when you press the gas pedal in a vehicle, it doesn't actually say 'move the vehicle forward', it says 'apply this much torque to the wheels' and the physics takes over and does the rest."

BOFFINS FROM NASA

In principle of course, this is true even in *UT2004*, but game physics are set to take a massive step towards reality with UE3.0, thanks in part to the appearance of a new player on the market. NovodeX, a new physics engine from Switzerland, has been chosen by Epic to look after Newton's Laws in UE3.0, in favour of heavyweights like Havok and Karma. The engine is capable of some pretty gobsmacking stuff, not least in terms of destructible objects and ragdolls.

In fact, the very term 'ragdoll' is in jeopardy, because though it's a very



I can see for miles: the broad outdoor environments are a wonder to behold.

good way of describing the rubbish, floppy bodies we see in current games, it's an utter misnomer when applied to NovodeX's uncannily realistic bodies. With far more advanced constraints put on limb movement, accurate friction applied to joints and every joint and limb potentially breakable, NovodeX is set to make current ragdolls look like, well, kids' toys.

As an aside, it also makes *Soldier Of Fortune*-style dismemberment an out-of-the-box option. "Yeah, that type of stuff is easy to do," laughs Mark. "Plus,

whenever a joint breaks, you can ping off some events from that. So you get your particle system to spew out some blood, say. And with the new material system, you'll be able to have blood spraying on people now as well." Oh dear, just wait till the *Leisure Suit Larry* people get their hands on this...

SCIENCE IN ACTION

The thing is, this is only the beginning. Epic only implemented NovodeX in April, and it's barely scratched the surface of its potential. "They've

NO UT2005

NEXT-GEN UT CONFIRMED, BUT NOT FOR NEXT YEAR

It seems Atari, erstwhile publisher of the *Unreal Tournament* series, may have given us all a bum steer. When *UT2003* came out, it suggested that the series was to follow the EA Sports model, releasing slightly updated versions every year. Now, however, it seems that's not the case.

When we met with Epic boss Mark Rein, he confirmed that there are plans for a *UT* game on Unreal Engine 3.0 (a mouth-watering prospect if ever there was one), but that it won't appear until 2006. As for details of the game, the usually effusive Canadian would say only this: "As we're re-building everything on the new engine, we probably can't match the amount of content we've got in *UT2004*. So I'd say we'll concentrate on the really popular stuff like *Onslaught* and *Assault* and make sure those are really cool."



In the future, all hair will look like this.



We're guessing this is not a friendly character.



THE FUTURE OF THE FPS... HOLLYWOOD CALLING

WILL UNREAL TECHNOLOGY ONE DAY REPLACE CAMERAS AND CELLULOID?

The Epic crew are a forward-thinking bunch. Not only do they imagine a day when Unreal technology is used to make all games, they also envisage a day when it's used to power the very films we watch.

Indeed, the team is already making inroads into Hollywood, encouraging filmmakers to use Unreal technology in situations where once pre-rendered CGI was the norm. At the moment, this isn't material you actually see, more proof-of-concept work and moving storyboards – but even so, the advantages of doing everything in real time are vast. Says Epic boss Mark Rein: "In a couple of years, when a director says, 'I want to make this happen in my movie', they're not going to bother with CG; they're just going to get an engine like this and set up the situations and see if it works or not."

However, as Mark's keen to point out, it doesn't stop there: "I'm going to go on record as predicting that, maybe



Nemo beware: the Unreal Engine 3.0 is fast catching up with CG.

ten years from now, they'll be making movies with our technology – for the final rendering. We're not that far away from being able to do a *Toy Story* or something even more realistic in this version of the engine, in real time."

It's a remarkable thought that game engines could one day supplant the entire machinery of making cinema. Perhaps even more exciting, it means that any one of us could get the Unreal modding tools and – even as early as 2006 – create a movie to rival Pixar. "We're not going to put Pixar out of business," laughs Mark. "We're just going to license our engine to them."



demonstrated some pretty cool stuff to us," says Tim. "Soft-body dynamics, fluid dynamics, some very realistic breaking of objects. They've done a lot of research on that, where they can analyse existing objects and figure out how they'd respond in certain situations. So, you start with a solid object and apply forces to it and the engine calculates how a real material of that type would break. It then fragments the object, adds polygons in the interior and gives you multiple objects as a result."

BREAKING THE MOULD

Think about that for a second. Not only does this mean you'll be seeing far more breakable objects in games, it introduces a random element never seen before. So, if you're shooting (say) palings off a wooden fence, then theoretically NovodeX can make every single one splinter and break in a completely different and convincing way. Now that's what you call science.

"You'll also see things like entire rooms or buildings that are destructible," enthuses Tim. "We have basic examples of that running right now, but over the next few years you'll see dramatic improvements in this area, to the point of entire cities being destroyable. In fact, there's no reason why we couldn't build every building out of individual bricks now and do it all true to life, but you'd need a ridiculous amount of computing power to do that – by today's standards."

Clearly however, it's only a matter of time. If not in Epic's next game, then very soon after you'll be treated to environments where every building and object can be destroyed or broken or dealt with arbitrarily – within the limitations imposed by gameplay at least. And if we ever get sick of blowing stuff up, then maybe we'll try constructible environments instead. Nah...

STYLE WARS

But of course, reality is not the be-all and end-all. In fact, some of us at PC ZONE are sick and tired of the obsession with 'reality' (and certain Hollywood variants thereon) that dominates the whole PC gaming arena, especially shooters. There've been some commendable departures from this in



"Get that camera out of my face before I cave your puny skull in with it."

"UE3.0 has the potential to do some amazing things that seemed impossible even a year or two ago"

recent years – *XIII*, *Tron 2.0*, *NOLF2* – but we want to see more twisted, unusual and heavily stylised games in the future. Luckily, Epic has the same ideas.

"It's not just about realism," agrees Mark. "Any computing power that can be applied to making scenes more realistic can also be applied to making them like, reality-plus. And I think this is where you're going to see the changes with what people do with Unreal Engine 3.0. Now that we can have shaders on every surface, the most important job

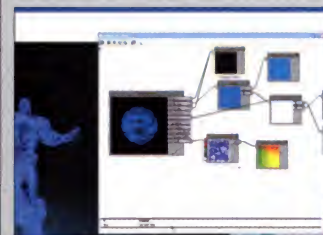
of a programmer will be to stylise the game. It's the last 50-100 lines of code between your game and the end-user's eyes – not engine code but pixel shaders – that are going to make the biggest difference. So you can have a gritty, stylised environment, a film noir movie environment – whatever you want."

THE STAGE IS SET

Clearly, Unreal Engine 3.0 has the potential to do some pretty amazing things – things that seemed distant possibilities as little as a year or two ago.

Indeed, you could say the shackles are effectively off for developers now. Epic has done the hard work: it's made the engine, built the tools and it's delivered the full power of DirectX 9 in a uniquely intuitive, cutting-edge package. It's now up to the development community to rise to the challenge and deliver some equally amazing gameplay. This time around, there's no excuses. [X]

VISUAL INTERFACE



The new Unreal Engine tools are super-intuitive to use.

DEVELOPERS HAVE AN EASY TIME OF IT WITH UNREAL ENGINE 3.0

One of the most astounding things about Unreal Engine 3.0 is just how easy it is to use. Following an idea of intuitive 'tree-like' interfaces, the new Unreal Editor 3.0 toolset puts a huge amount of power in the hands of artists, level designers and gameplay scripters, enabling them to create and manipulate huge amounts of game material in real-time and drop it straight into the game – all without programmer intervention.

"UE3.0 really gives artists far more control over the whole development pipeline than they've ever had in the past," agrees Tim Sweeney.

All the systems – physics, materials, sound, shaders and so on – are also cleverly linked together. As such, if you change the properties of an object in one system, it automatically affects properties in all the other systems. "So let's say you've got an object, a block of something," explains technical artist/designer Alan Willard. "If you set the physical material to wood, straight away your wooden block floats and hits with a certain weight, and you get splinters instead of sparks if you shoot it and so on."

"It's all far more intuitive and easier to understand," raves Mark Rein. "My mind boggles at what mod-makers are going to be able to do with this."

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

HOW FAR AWAY IS TRUE PHOTOREALISM?

As amazing as these visuals are by today's standards, true photorealism remains a pipe dream for the games industry. However, according to Epic programmer Tim Sweeney, it's not as inconceivable as you may think. "All the programmers at Epic got together one day," recalls the rangy coder, "and just for fun did a computation of how much more computing power we need before graphics is 'done'. We define 'done' as like, take double the resolution of the highest res HDTV and what it takes to render a completely photorealistic scene at that level of detail and that resolution. We came to a conclusion that it'd take between 10,000 and 40,000 times more computing power than we have right now."

Scary numbers sure, but Tim insists that this is only 15-18 years away, according to Moore's (increasingly out of date) Law and other advances that are happening right now. "It's in our lifetime," grins Tim, "but we certainly have a lot of work to do."



Good, but no photo.

GRAPHICS



THE SUFFERING



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"We want to craft a continuous experience so you can play the story instead of reading it on load screens or watching it on cut-scenes"

CRAIG HUBBARD
LEAD DESIGNER, F.E.A.R.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.lith.com
ETA Late 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the makers of *NOLF2* and *AvP2*
- All-new shader-based engine
- Hugely atmospheric and potentially terrifying
- No cut-scenes – you play the story

Cooooee! She's above you!

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
143

Feed your...

F.E.A.R.

ON THE
DVD

Fantastic Expectations. Amazing Revelations. *Dave Woods* implores you to forget everything and remember the following...



The anti-gun campaign won't be fans of F.E.A.R..



CV



MONOLITH

A company that's always tried to do shooters with a difference. Come inside and have a look, but leave your preconceptions at the door...

1998 *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*. "Bloody great huge robots many games do not sell." Monolith ignored this proverb and we were extremely thankful. An excellent game, but criminally overlooked.

2001 *AvP2*. The scariest game ever? Possibly, and one that also relied on the suspense of the unknown to deliver the thrills and chills.

2002 *NOLF2*. A sequel that excelled where the original *NOLF* failed, *NOLF2* is a groovy shooter dashed with globs of humour. Still worth checking out if you can find it for less than a tenner.

2003 *Tron 2.0*. A sequel to the cult 1982 film, *Tron 2.0* was an ambitious and intriguing game that just, just, failed to engage us completely.

Big blokes with guns, come on down!

F.E.A.R. was announced a couple of months back and instantly made a bloody huge impact in the PC ZONE offices. We're always clamouring for intelligent adult games (no, not that sort), and the teaser Monolith released at E3, packed with gore, scares-a-plenty and a ghostly little girl capable of ripping the gizzards out of anything and everything that dares to ask 'shouldn't you be in bed?' more than sated our base desires. It was time to find out more...

F.E.A.R. (YOU GOT THE FEAR)

According to Craig Hubbard, lead game designer on the project, *F.E.A.R.* was born out of wanting to code a

completely cinematic experience. "You can see that philosophy at work with the freefall sequence in *NOLF* and the tornado in *NOLF2*, but we always cut away at some point. This time around, we wanted to craft a continuous experience, enabling you to play the story instead of reading it on load screens or watching it in cut-scenes between game sequences. Other games have gone this route, of course, but often at the expense of dimensionality and depth of characterisation and exposition."

Certain inspirations from the big screen are obvious. The new subtle strain of Japanese horror (*Ring*,



Dark Water etc) and the more Glock-in-hand approach of John Woo are two gimmicks. However, the combination of the two could define a game that has to provide action to succeed but wants to deliver the scares through the subtleties of suspense, something Hubbard sees as the best way to scare an audience.

"Part of what I responded to when I first saw *Dark Water* was the fact that you never see the little girl's face, which creates a degree of tension that no production designer's most nightmarish concepts could ever match. Once you see the monster for what it is, it's easy to over-analyse it to the point that it's no longer scary. The brilliance of *Alien* was that you only got brief glimpses of dripping jaws and monstrous shadows on the wall. As great as the creature design is, what I imagined was far more disturbing than the reality."

And this 'less is more' approach is what makes the game unique in its genre. With almost every other game going for a discernable enemy and scares through numbers, *F.E.A.R.* is likely to be the one that gets under your skin. The one that you don't play just before you turn the lights off in case it crawls into your dreams.

QUEENSBURY RULES

A lot of people are already pointing towards *The Matrix* as an inspiration for the slow-mo scenes in *F.E.A.R.*, something Hubbard finds amusing.

"Actually, Sam Peckinpah demonstrated what slow motion could do for an action scene way back in the '60s and '70s, before the Wachowski brothers were even in kindergarten." And that's before John Woo put the motion back into slow, with classics like *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*, or

"With every other game going for scares by numbers, *F.E.A.R.* is likely to be the one that gets under your skin"

Ringo Lam's camera followed the flight of individual bullets in *Full Contact*.

As in *Max Payne*, the slow-mo scenes in *F.E.A.R.* are mainly player-activated, although you might be kicked into some automatically at certain points and you constantly stay slightly faster



Oh bugger. I only meant to scare him.

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

IT'S BEHIND YOU, ARRGGHHH! WE'RE ALL DOOMED!

'Sick Games Killed My Children!'; 'Serial Murderer Played *Tetris* - Ban All Games Now!'; 'Osama and Saddam Created Evil *Quake* Game!'

Exaggerations maybe, but not too far from the way most fear-mongering tabloid editors and Middle England morons see the games industry, particularly the FPS genre. They have a small point deeply buried within all the hyperbole. This genre hasn't been without its fair share of controversial titles - *Doom*, *Kingpin*, *Soldier Of Fortune*, all of which are said to be heading down the sequel route.

Doom in particular doesn't shy away from the gory side of things, to the extent that the upcoming third instalment has

already been given a full-on '18' certificate by the BBFC (as well as an 'M for Mature' rating Stateside).

And why not? The biggest misconception games still face in the outside world is that they're all for kids. Hopefully, *Doom 3* will change that perception somewhat. id Software has gone on record saying that it doesn't make games for kids - never has and never will.

Doom 3 is all about putting the laxative industry out of business - brooding menace, fear-inducing lighting, pacing to rival any horror film and a dependence on audio effects that will leave you cowering in the corner for weeks. Expect a review shortly.

ADULTS ONLY



No children allowed in *Doom 3* - it's been branded an 18 by the BBFC.



That's not going to end well.

Why Don't You?...

WHEN WE SAY WE WANT SCARY, WE MEAN S-C-A-R-Y...

Monolith is still keeping its cards close to its chest as far as *F.E.A.R.* goes, but we hope that word of Japanese horror isn't just talk that fades into white noise. Here are a few suggestions we'd like to insist on...

- *F.E.A.R.* doesn't have to make 'Hollywood' sense. Put some elements in just because they're disturbing.
- Use off-screen noises and even long periods of silence to raise the temperature and then, when we can't take anymore, try to scare us, literally, to death.
- Don't feel the need to tie up all your loose ends: that way, there's plenty of scope for a twisted imagination to kick in.
- Don't dilute the game for a younger audience. We'll put a curse on you...

Dark Water was very scary. *F.E.A.R.* should be too. Be afraid...



I love the smell of Nap... Hang on, wrong game.

than your opponents, which gives you a crucial edge. Unlike *Max Payne* though, it's not going to be left to modders to code hand-to-hand combat. It's a major part of *F.E.A.R.*, and something that's been missing from games because it's bloody hard to implement in a believable and controllable first-person fashion. So far, we've only seen a brief glimpse of

the fighting model, but Hubbard is convinced it's going to work well.

"Initially, there was a fair amount of scepticism about how fighting would feel in first-person, but Kevin Stephens, our director of technology, championed the idea until we did some prototyping. At the very least, we knew we'd end up with something more rewarding than the typical punch or rifle butt animations

"It's just a flesh wound! C'mon man, stand up and fight!"

we'd done in the past. The results were promising enough that we decided to develop a context-driven system that lets you perform different manoeuvres simply by aiming at an enemy's face or legs. There are also different moves based on whether you're running, jumping, crouching or standing still. The key was to give the player an interesting array of attacks, but keep the interface simple and intuitive."

BRAINIAC

But *F.E.A.R.* isn't a beat 'em up. As a *F.E.A.R.* operative (First Encounter Assault Recon), you've got access to a stack of hardcore futuristic weaponry – and you get to put them to the test in some huge explosive firefights. You play through certain sections of the game solo, but in others you're fighting against squads, with team-mates fighting alongside you.

Without direct control, sidekicks have historically proved a liability, wandering off, bumping into walls and generally hampering (rather than helping) your efforts. Monolith is well aware that the success of *F.E.A.R.* could rest on the



prowess of its AI, and has employed a specialist AI architect to ensure that they play as well as you do.

Hubbard continues: "Squad AI has been a major focus. Squad and enemy AI are one and the same for us. You have team-mates that fight with you, but the enemies work together too. In addition to basic squad behaviours such as covering each other, laying suppression fire and advancing in formation, we've also focused on communication between squad members.

"Enemies alert each other to danger, better firing positions and opportunities to advance. They also shout strategies like, 'wait for it to clear!' after a room fills with smoke and debris. Enemies keep in contact with squad members via radio

and recognise there's a problem when there's no response. Enemies can also form new squads with allies they meet, and sometimes change their tactics accordingly. For example, soldiers that join forces with a heavily armoured ally will take cover behind him."

GHOST STORY

And with that, Monolith shut up shop and despite our best efforts at wheedling out little scraps of info, the story is staying a secret for now. The game isn't likely to see the light of day until late 2005 and Monolith doesn't want to show its hand too early. We're sorely hoping it's going to stay true to the supernatural side of the teaser and not disappoint us with a trite sci-fi no-

"Enemies can also form new squads with allies they meet and change their tactics to suit"

CRAIG HUBBARD
LEAD DESIGNER, F.E.A.R.

brainer to sleepwalk through. One thing's for sure though: Monolith knows how to talk a good game, and with a stable that boasts *NOLF2* and *AvP2*, both *ZONE* classics, *F.E.A.R.*'s got the lineage to back up the trouser talk. **PC**

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS... STORY



Pariah uses honest-to-god Hollywood screenwriters.

GUNS, GUNS AND MORE GUNS. OH NO, HANG ON...

Shoot your gun at monsters and try not to die for a long time – that was about as sophisticated as the FPS storyline got. Sure, there'd be attempts at characterisation or back story, but it was always an afterthought. *Doom* = big hole to hell on Mars, kill all monsters. Hardly Dickens (Charles' little-known younger brother).

Not anymore. As audiences grow ever more sophisticated, so too does their need for emotional engagement in their gaming experiences. *F.E.A.R.* borrows much from the world of film in atmosphere, as well as building a convincing narrative that drives you to the end of the game. *Pariah* is employing actual Hollywood screenwriters to help weave notions of survival into the usual explosive material, while *Vampire: Bloodlines* takes the genre towards a much darker and grittier environment than we may have been used to till now.

But can it really work? Tight narratives always require strong character development, but with a player in charge of the action, emotional growth is nearly impossible to achieve in a FPS. But we're taking small steps. As with most developments, it's a gradual evolution – but as the technology makes visual immersion ever more believable, so our attachment to the characters will grow.



"It's really hard to read this caption from this angle."

SHADES OF BRILLIANCE

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY A NEW GRAPHICS CARD. NO. 674 IN A SERIES OF 1,000...

When we first saw *F.E.A.R.*, one of our first questions was shot down before we'd even finished. "So, this is obviously using the next-generation LithTech engine, could you..." "Er, sir. This is a completely new, entirely shader-based DX9 engine." So said John O'Rourke, the engine architect – and he should know. But why the move to the new engine? "We've found the best way to develop technology is to first define the game, and then identify what specific technology would best allow for its creation." Which obviously sounds eminently sensible.

And from what we've seen, *F.E.A.R.* is defined by the very effects that we've been going on about for the past year: shattering glass, showers of sparks and debris flying through the air. It's a game that uses DX9 to its full and enables the developer to "create a huge assortment of effects and materials using nothing more than a simple text editor". Marry these visuals to a realistic physics model and cinematic sound quality and you've got a next-gen blockbuster in the making. If you haven't seen the short trailer for the game yet, it's on our DVD and should give you a good idea of what to expect when the game ships.



The waiting time at the doctor's surgery proved too much for some.

INTERPOKER FACE-OFF



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You can only hope that they stop pointing their guns at each other soon...

They ain't heavy, they're our...

BROTHERS IN ARMS



Martin Korda takes a trip to Normandy to uncover the secrets behind Gearbox's potentially ground-breaking WWII shooter

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gearbox

PUBLISHER Ubisoft

WEBSITE

www.brothersinarmsgame.com

ETA October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Advanced AI
- Intuitive context-sensitive command system
- Smart-looking graphics engine
- Could be the most researched and realistic WWII shooter ever

"EVERYBODY FIGHTS.

Nobody quits. Always attack." It's the kind of rallying cry that helped fortify the spirits of the brave men of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment minutes before they dropped into Normandy in a daring and massively successful bid to flank the German defenders during the D-Day landings.

Today however, the mantra is aimed at a bunch of pot-bellied, dishevelled journalists, and bellowed by John Antal, recently retired US colonel and military adviser on Gearbox's mouth-moistening WWII shooter *Brothers In Arms*.

For the past three and a half years, Gearbox has been feverishly researching the role that the 502nd regiment played during the Allies' Normandy invasion in World War II. It's done this by regularly travelling to France on detailed research trips, studying air reconnaissance photographs from 1944 and speaking to countless WWII veterans about the war. Add to this Antal's 30 years of tactical and historical military experience and you've got all the ingredients to make a less epic, but hopefully much more focused and emotional WWII recreation.

CV

gearbox
software

GEARBOX

One of the busiest games developers in the world, Gearbox has not only managed to churn out a huge number of games in its short five-year existence, it's also raised the bar in AI and online multiplayer level design. *Brothers In Arms* is its first original game, and here are just a few of the company's past highlights...

1999 Gearbox releases its first title, *Half-Life: Opposing Force*. The first and best *Half-Life* expansion pack, it features some of the most intelligent AI ever seen in an FPS.

2002 The start of the company's 'conversion' period sees the superb port of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* onto the PC.

2003 Gearbox further cements its reputation with an excellent port of *Halo: Combat Evolved*. Gearbox's new online multiplayer mode wins countless plaudits too.



Like summertime in the UK. Only dryer.



"Would this be a bad time to tell you that I love you?"

SO IT BEGINS

And so we find ourselves in a Normandy châteaux on a blustery, rain-soaked night, psyched up by Antal and ready to experience the game after a gruelling day of shadowing the team's final few field research trips. And as we're about to find out, Gearbox's attention to detail has not only paid off like a winning rollover lottery ticket, it could, along with the likes of *Half-Life 2*, be about to herald a new era in FPS development.

Gearbox's president Randy Pitchford loads up the game's first mission. Thirteen men, faces contorted with fear stand nervously in a low-flying plane

bucked by incessant enemy anti-aircraft fire. Each man's face tells a different story, displaying a subtly different emotion.

But Pitchford doesn't linger long on this opening mission, instead jumping to a later level set at Dead Man's Corner, a local junction in the small French town of Carentan that we'd visited only hours earlier. The recreation of the area was staggering, even down to the red-and-white window panes that framed each house's windows.

Controlling the game's main character, Sergeant Baker, Pitchford orders his team to move out, double-timing up a steep slope towards a farm where German forces await, each paratrooper running with the lifelike movements of a soldier carrying a heavy kitbag.

MAN MANAGEMENT

Unlike the epic, scripted battles of *Call Of Duty: United Offensive* (see page 50), *Brothers In Arms* is all about controlling

a small squad of troops in tactically intense battlefield situations through the use of an intuitive, context-sensitive command system. It's not long before we see it in action as Pitchford's squad comes under intense fire from German forces ensconced in a derelict farmhouse.

"You'll always be in command of two squads: a fire team and an assault team. The first team suppresses the enemy, while the assault team moves in to kill the enemy," explains Pitchford as he



THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

SOON YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO TELL THE BOTS FROM THE BOYS...

Intelligence: gaming's biggest obstacle. Let's face it, most in-game NPCs that date would struggle to outwit a *Big Brother* contestant. While visual tech has advanced at phenomenal speeds, progress in the field of making you believe the guy you're shooting in the face has anything between his ears has been far slower.

It's been a gradual evolution, one game lending ideas that feed the next, while never having the immediate impact of a new shading technique. Occasionally a game boasts a revolution – such as *Far Cry*'s insistence that

coordinated searching patterns for enemy troops was the future – but usually it depends as much on the intelligence of the player as the quality of the coding. One man's genius is another man's moron. The key really lies in the art of illusion: fooling the player into thinking the bots are calculating individuals when in reality it's all just very advanced smoke and mirrors.

The best area for demonstrating this is with team-mate AI. Games such as *SWAT 4* and *Operation Flashpoint 2* centre entirely around the team experience, so it becomes vital to

AI QUALITY

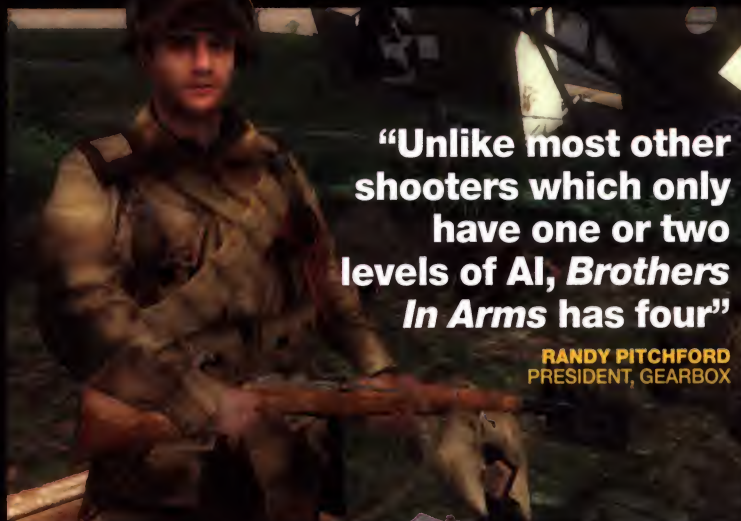


Smart, but let's see them do *The Times* crossword...

make you feel you can rely on these beautifully rendered algorithms to be there to bail you out when the going gets tough.



"...58, 59, 60. Coming, ready or not!"



"Unlike most other shooters which only have one or two levels of AI, *Brothers In Arms* has four"

RANDY PITCHFORD
PRESIDENT, GEARBOX

Facial expressions add a whole new dimension to characterisation.

orders his men to take cover. "With the right mouse button, I can issue orders with the context-sensitive command system. If I point to the ground, I can order my men to move to that position. If I point at the enemy, I order them to attack."

As the battle unfolds, Pitchford expertly executes his commands with single, right mouse button clicks. While his fire team autonomously searches out suitable cover, he leads his assault team round the back of the Nazis. But they've spotted his intent, and the AI controlled enemies desperately try to keep pace with Pitchford's team to avoid being flanked while ducking for cover and returning fire at his now dug-in fire team.

"Even the enemy are like real people - they don't want to die and so they won't just charge at you. They want to live, so they use fire and manoeuvre tactics against you," Pitchford explains. He then points to the

red circles that've appeared above each enemy's head. "These circles are suppression monitors," he continues. "They tell you how suppressed every enemy soldier is, but if you want the game to be even more realistic, you can turn them off and not know."

FREEZE FRAME

Suddenly, the firefight stops, men freezing as though suspended in time. Pitchford introduces this as the

KEEPING IT REAL



RESEARCH IS THE FUTURE, ACCORDING TO GEARBOX...

Gearbox has spent a lot of time and effort researching *Brothers In Arms*. "Five years ago, it would've been impossible to do the type of research we're doing because it would've been too expensive," explains Gearbox president Randy Pitchford. "Now we're getting to the point where we can be confident of selling enough units and reaching enough customers, so we can afford to do the homework."

Every aspect of the game has been researched to the max, and the whole team even went out and tested authentic WWII weapons and walked every square inch of the area that it's reproducing. While we were in Normandy with the team, they were still snapping every dip, hole and bush in order to ensure complete accuracy.

"I think *Brothers In Arms* goes further than any other game like it by a significant margin, but I don't think it's the end. Over the next few years, developers will get closer and closer to attaining real experiences by doing this kind of research and by harnessing new technologies. In *Brothers In Arms*, we're authentic to the yard - future games will start being authentic to the inch."

Before development began in earnest, military adviser John Antal drilled the whole team in military history, as well as training them in the subtleties of the fire and manoeuvre battlefield tactics that were employed during WWII.

"The authenticity is built by little pieces," explains Antal. "If an artist has actually fired an authentic rifle that's in the game - like the Thompson sub-machine gun, M1 Carbine or thrown an anti-tank Gammon bomb - when it comes to designing it, he makes it more realistic. In some other games, if an artist designs a tank but has never seen a real one, it doesn't look or act realistically."

The result is a game that Gearbox believes is the most realistic reproduction of WWII combat ever created. We hope to see the full exhaustive fruits of its labour when *Brothers in Arms* is released this autumn.

Situational Awareness view, a feature that enables you to fly over the battlefield and assess the status of your and the enemy's men in an RTS-style. Zooming in, he reveals a breathtaking level of detail, including puffs of smoke, scorched stone, realistic muzzle flashes, splintering wood, cowering soldiers and a perfect recreation of the area we'd visited earlier in the day.

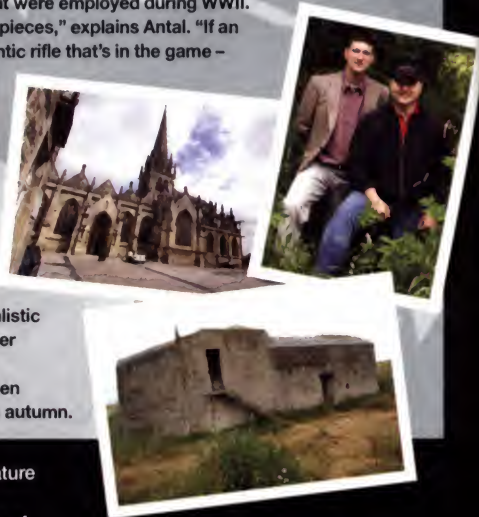
Watching Pitchford play *Brothers In Arms* is akin to sitting through a war movie. The realism, detail and eyeball-bursting effects, along with the screams, explosions, and surroundings induce a true sense of fear and panic, the kind that must have

been felt by the thousands of men who took part in the liberation of France.

ADAPTATION

But what's caught our attention more than anything is the AI, which acts more like a fragile human terrified of death than a characterless AI drone. "Unlike most other shooters which only have one or two levels of AI, *Brothers In Arms* has four," explains Pitchford.

"Simulated Intelligence tells the enemy when and how to move, pick a target and shoot. Expert Systems Intelligence is where the environment speaks to the AI. So a certain location





Looks like it's game over for this poor fella.



The 502nd Parachute Infantry was among the first to land in D-Day Normandy.



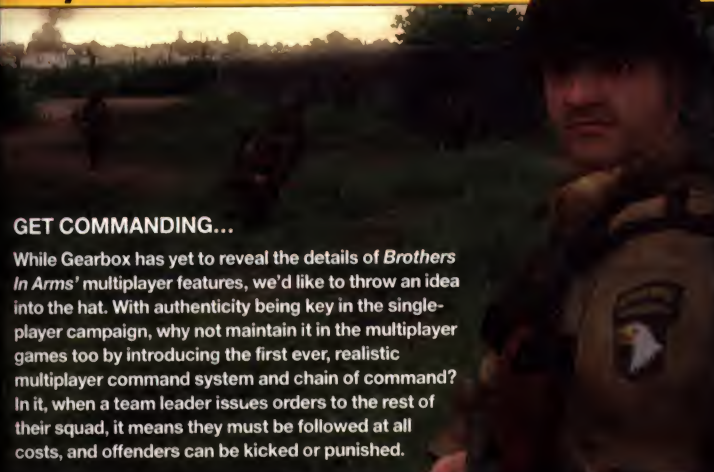
BIA is about tactics and squad dynamics, rather than epic scripted battles.

may say to the AI that it's a good place to use for cover, or to hide. Or it can tell them that there's a window they can climb through or a wall they can jump over or crouch behind to take cover.

"Then we have Situational AI, which gives commands to the enemy, the same

way that you can give commands to your troops. It notes what's going on in the battle and helps the Germans use fire and manoeuvre tactics. It works out where all of the Germans are, how many are still alive and then breaks them up into teams. So if you order your men to

Why Don't You?...



GET COMMANDING...

While Gearbox has yet to reveal the details of *Brothers In Arms*' multiplayer features, we'd like to throw an idea into the hat. With authenticity being key in the single-player campaign, why not maintain it in the multiplayer games too by introducing the first ever, realistic multiplayer command system and chain of command? In it, when a team leader issues orders to the rest of their squad, it means they must be followed at all costs, and offenders can be kicked or punished.

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS... STRATEGY



Victory in *Battlefield 2* requires deep planning.

KILLING A MAN TAKES MORE THAN JUST A TRIGGER FINGER...


Until now, the most advanced planning you'll have had to consider is working out how to get from here to over there without being shot to ribbons by the wave of aliens standing in the middle. By and large, the decisions boil down to shotgun vs sniper rifle.

The biggest problem with offering tactical choices is interface: stopping to open up maps and menus while under fire is a sure route to an early virtual grave. The best upcoming example of a solution is with *Battlefield 2*, although even this is a refined version of that seen in *Rainbow Six 3*. Squad leaders can pull up a context-sensitive radial menu around their crosshairs, instantly opening a world of tactical options that help to prolong the survival of the team. Combined with NPC AI, as *Republic Commando* is set to demonstrate, even single-player games suddenly take on a whole new dimension.

Ultimately, certainly as far as multiplayer games go, the FPS will have to learn the lessons of its gaming cousin, the RTS. As with *BF2*'s Commander mode, the biggest step forward a thinking soldier can do is to put down his gun and direct the action from the sidelines. Remember, there's no 'I' in 'Owned'.

try and flank the enemy on the left, the Germans can react to that and try to move the same way to stop you. You can hear them yelling instructions at each other, because that's how the Nazi forces were trained – like a football team. The fourth AI system is the scripted event, but unlike most other FPSs, you won't see this very often."

Having seen *Brothers In Arms* at such close quarters and visited the

real-life locations, it's clear that it's shaping up to be a top-notch shooter, vindicating Gearbox's years of painstaking research. The engine's ability to render realistic facial expressions and mannerisms brings a whole new real-world dimension, while the battles come closer to depicting the horror of WWII skirmishes than most other squad-based shooters we've seen. Roll on October. 



THE FUTURE
OF THE FPS

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL



Curious comings and goings with the dark horse of the upcoming battle of the über-shooters

DOOM 3. *Half-Life 2.* *F.E.A.R.* All cream of the shooter crop (we hope, at least), but all with the same template of running, gunning, sneaking and shooting. Welcome back then, to the Chernobyl forbidden zone – the place where the accustomed FPS routines have been dissected, placed in petri-dishes and exposed to doses of radiation. A place where the FPS has mutated into a vast free-roaming adventure of unscripted events and AI-imposed action – should developer GSC Gameworld fulfil its lofty ambition.

With a release date promised for September, it's slightly worrying that these screens show little that wasn't in the code that *ZONE* played back in February. However, what they do show is all manner of DX9 effects (impressive shadows, muzzle-flashes and the like) that've been jammed into the forbidden zone's already impressive engine. We might be worried about a slip, but if *Stalker* turns into the blueprint that GSC Gameworld has proposed, you could well be looking at stills of a game that's due to become an emblem of the exact reasons why you became a PC gamer. That's a big 'if' and it might take a while to get here, but here's hoping...

- Publisher: THQ
- Developer: GSC Gameworld
- ETA: September
- Website: www.stalker-game.com



THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE... OR MAYBE THE OTHER.
DO YOU WANT TO BE LED BY THE HAND OR SET FREE?

Half-Life was the greatest FPS of all time. Why? Because it was also the most limiting. Despite presenting the illusion of a go-anywhere world in which you fought for Gordon Freeman's survival, it was actually more scripted than a David Mamet screenplay, as any repeated playing quickly showed. Not that it mattered as it proved that when done right, even the most freedom-restricting game in the world can be completely and utterly enthralling.

As scary as the 'Striders' and flying buzzsaws from the *Half-Life 2* movies may be, perhaps the most frightening aspect about the upcoming mega-sequel is that all the reports point towards these

things being utterly freeform in nature. If the tight scripting was the original's strongest point, what does this mean for the fate of the sequel?

Not that freeform gaming is necessarily a bad thing. As games such as *Stalker* and the *Operation Flashpoint* sequel are set to demonstrate, there's plenty of scope for thrilling random adventures in the gaming world. It becomes mostly dependent on quality AI programming to pull it off with any degree of success, as any gamer worth his (or her) salt will try to 'break' the game at the first available opportunity. There's hope for *Half-Life 2* yet.

LINEAR VS FREEFORM



Strictly A-to-B action with *Serious Sam 2*.



A Rebel marksman takes up a sniper position high up in the Cloud City level on Bespin.



Lift-off for the Jet Trooper.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios/LucasArts
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com
ETA September 21

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Squad-based single and multiplayer gaming in the *Star Wars* universe
- Four different factions from Episodes I-VI
- Over 30 vehicles and 30 weapons
- You can shoot Ewoks

Ewok-hunting we will go...



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Jamie Sefton hyperspaces to Endor (well, a forest in San Francisco) for an exclusive play of LucasArts' Wookiee-stuffed squad-based blaster



CV

PANDEMIC

PANDEMIC STUDIOS

Pandemic is one of a group of third-party developers (including BioWare) who have enjoyed great success producing *Star Wars* games for LucasArts. Pandemic is also now hard at work developing the impressive-looking action game *Mercenaries* for LucasArts and squad-based US Army shooter *Full Spectrum Warrior* for THQ.

1999 *Battlezone II* was an excellent 3D action-RTS that gained 87 per cent back in issue 84.

2000 Another year, another action-RTS, this time set in an apocalyptic Earth future. We didn't particularly go for *Dark Reign 2*, only giving it 62 per cent in issue 93.

2003 *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* is console-only, but becomes Pandemic's first *Star Wars* title. Set after *Episode II*, *The Clone Wars* is a decent vehicular combat game with Xbox Live multiplayer online compatibility – ideal practice for the development of *Battlefront*.

"WE LIKE being evil," says LucasArts' David Zemke, as he lines up his Scout Trooper's sniper rifle sight at an Ewok and downs the cuddly creature with one sharp blast to the head. *Star Wars Battlefront* could well be the game that the hordes of rabid Lucas fans have been chewing their replica lightsabers for – a first- and third-person squad-based multiplayer shooter set on locations from all six movies and the extended universe.

"This is *Star Wars* meets *Battlefield 1942*," says a brutally honest Zemke. "We're putting people in the middle of the battle, giving them the ability to use any vehicle and be any character they want. You can choose any side or soldier and jump right in."

FOREST MOON

It's 7.30 in the evening and I've just arrived via minibus (complete with piped *Star Wars* music of course) to the *Battlefront* event, where San Francisco's National Park – the Presidio – is doing a mightily impressive job of doubling for

the forest planet Endor. As well as shipping in legions of Stormtroopers and Rebels, LucasArts has set up tents with a 16-strong PC LAN, where I can sit and blast away at US journalists and the in-house development team (see 'Welcome To Endor', page 48).

Although *Battlefront* is predominantly a multiplayer game, there are still three single-player modes for those less sociable gamers, with the ability to call on your AI squad-mates using simple one-key commands such as 'Follow Me' or 'Hold Position'. First, the Historical Campaign mode provides a story-based 17-mission experience across both the Clone War and the Civil War. Second, Instant Action is just that – you can get straight into the battles and fight for any of the four factions (Imperials vs Rebels, or Clone Army vs Confederacy of

Independent Systems) on any of the game's ten planets. These include Hoth, Tatooine and the Wookiee planet Kashyyyk from the upcoming *Star Wars Episode III*.

Finally, there's the Galactic Conquest mode, where you can create your own custom campaign and set off on a quest to rule the entire galaxy. Once you've conquered a planet, you unlock special bonuses to use in later levels, such as the *Star Wars* NPCs Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, who can burn through multiple enemies with their unique lightsaber weapons.

However, it's the online multiplayer element of *Battlefront* that's really getting us excited here today, with two

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS... FRANCHISES



Breaking new genres with *Republic Commando*.

A LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY

Of the factors that make up 'The Future Of The FPS', franchising is as easy to predict as a major international football tournament. Oh, hang on... Big-name films will always beget well-hyped games, which in turn will always be ultimately unfulfilling and leave a sour taste in the mouth.

Or that's the theory. Truth be told, marketing divisions have grasped the concept that film-to-game conversions needn't be second-rate and have begun assigning the projects to respectable developers.

The results aren't always stellar – witness any Bond game since *GoldenEye*. Despite every dollar EA throws at the spy franchise, none have really set the FPS world on fire.

LucasArts is similar, although with a more varying degree of success. The *Star Wars* licence always used to denote a guarantee of utter toss, although lately, with the likes of *Jedi Academy* (and in non-FPS terms, *KOTOR* and *Star Wars Galaxies*), it's turned the boat around somewhat. *Republic Commando* looks set to continue the trend and the rumours about a Vader/Anakin-based shooter can only help if treated right.

The key thing, as proved by both of the above big names, is that these titles will sell *regardless* of quality. Which means that so long as there's money to be made, we'll keep seeing them. C'est la vie.

Do Ewoks shit in the woods? In this situation, we'd say yes.

of the 16 maps fully playable – Endor from *Return Of The Jedi* and Kamino from *Attack Of The Clones*.

The basic strategy behind the game is to dominate the battlefield by taking over control points by simply standing near them for a certain amount of time until they slowly change colour – red for the Rebels/Clones, white for neutral, green for the Imperials/CIS and yellow for various AI-controlled third factions. The process is painfully slow, but can be speeded up when additional members of your faction congregate around the marker. You also have other objectives

for each map that can bleed your enemy's game points to zero much quicker if you capture them, such as the shield generator on the ice planet Hoth.

THAT'S CLASSY

Each of the four sides has five distinct types of soldier class, each with different abilities and at least two weapon slots plus grenade and thermal detonator throwing using the right mouse button. So for example, the Rebels have a Soldier (armed with blaster rifle and pistol), Vanguard (missile launcher and pistol), Pilot (blaster cannon and pistol),

Marksman (sniper rifle and pistol) and a Wookiee Smuggler (bowcaster and grenade launcher).

"Since you last saw the game, we've beefed up certain classes such as the Pilot, who now has better equipment including a mortar launcher, the ability to build things, and dispense ammo and health packs," says Zemke. I decide to spawn on Endor as the Wookiee (of course) and immediately begin throwing grenades at the Imperial scum, one explosion flinging an unfortunate Stormtrooper several metres into the air. The enemy meanwhile



Speeder bikes are fantastic fun – just watch out for those trees...



You can switch instantly from a first-person to a third-person view.

have quickly leapt into their AT-STs and begun incinerating everything in the forest that comes within blasting distance of their colossal two-legged walkers – luckily the resourceful Ewoks have cleverly prepared lethal log traps, that I set off by shooting the ropes that hold them. Very cool indeed.

"The Ewoks are just one of many third factions you come across in *Battlefront*," continues Zemke. "On Tatooine you meet Tuskan Raiders, who are pretty tough and will try and take over spawn points in the middle of battle, regardless of whether you're playing as Imperials or Rebels. On Endor, the Ewoks run around and cause a lot of havoc, but as the Imperials you can actually shoot back. It brings out the mean streak in us, I don't know why – it's quite scary..."

HITCHING A RIDE

Soon after dropping my logs, I'm wiped out from distance by a sneaky Scout Trooper, so I decide to re-spawn as a Rebel pilot and have a crack at one of the most exciting aspects of *Star Wars Battlefront* – the vehicles.

As a Rebel, you can jump up and hijack vehicles such as an AT-ST (just like Chewbacca in *The Empire Strikes Back*) or if it's not occupied you can just hop in and take it over. Of course, as with the *Battlefield* games, several players or AI characters can take over the vehicles at once, with the largest craft, such as the Republic Gunship, allowing a maximum of six occupants. On the AT-ST I enjoyed enormous amounts of destruction, stomping around crushing Imperials underfoot, as my Rebel comrade from the LucasArts team shot at fleeing enemy troopers from a side window.

I then abandoned the smoking and damaged AT-ST to jump on a speeder bike, which proved to be rather different to control, accelerating much too quickly and careering spectacularly into the nearest tree. Let's face it – souped-up fast-moving vehicles and densely packed woodland aren't a good mix. However, once you get used to the handling, it really is a thrilling ride as you weave deftly in and out of the trees, taking pot-shots at Stormtroopers and rival speeders.



An unfortunate Rebel meets his match on Yavin IV.

"The battle maps are all different in look and feel, but also in how you play them"

DAVID ZEMKE
MARKETING MANAGER, LUCASARTS



Timber!



A well-placed thermal detonator can bring down an AT-ST.

WELCOME TO ENDOR

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT'S STORMTROOPER AND REBEL MEET-AND-GREET: MORE THAN JUST A PICNIC IN THE WOODS

Having just become one of the first UK journalists to actually stay the night at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch, I was already pretty fired up about *Star Wars*. However, the outdoor *Battlefront* event in San Francisco's National Park, the Presidio, was also very special, with dozens of Stormtroopers and Rebels lining the forest route up to specially constructed tents housing 16 PCs all connected via LAN. Also adding to the Endor atmosphere were the hidden speakers projecting Ewok chatter and a series of fires, echoing the ceremonial burning of Darth Vader in *Return Of The Jedi*. It's just a shame I forgot my Wookiee suit...



"Move along, move along..."



IMPERIAL2 OWN JOO! 111!111!!



A Jedi Starfighter rusting next to a control point on Kamino.

"The battle maps are all different in look and feel, but also in how you play them," continued Zemke. "The ice planet Hoth, for example, is a huge battlefield, so vehicles are a lot more important. That's why we also give you the opportunity to set up moving spawn points – the AT-ATs are actually moving points for the rebels, so that when you jump back into the game, you appear right beneath them."

What's very smart is that you can be the rear gunner at the back of the Snow Speeder who shoots the tow cable at

the Imperial Walkers. "Hoth has wide-open spaces and is great for multiplayer, but the team has also built in some indoor levels, with quick fighting in enclosed tunnels."

JET-POWERED

The rain-drenched ocean planet of Kamino is the next port of call, which involves an intense clash of Clone Troopers and the Droid Armies of the Separatists. The Droids have a decent selection of units, including the vicious plasma-pumping rolling robots the Droidekas, but it's the Clones, with the superb Jet Trooper unit that steals the show. A backpack icon on the top-right of the screen shows the limited energy for the jetpack, which regenerates after a short time. To use the jetpack, you double-tap on the default spacebar jump key to send your trooper zooming into the air – definitely the best use of this gameplay feature since *Tribes*.

Myself and the 15 other networked players had a fantastic battle on Kamino using the Jet Troopers, flying outside between the different platforms and steep pathways that are built



Clive Sinclair's latest vehicular innovation.

Why Don't You?...

MULTIPLAYER CO-OP – WHY NOT ONLINE AND ON PC?

LucasArts revealed that both the PS2 and Xbox will include split-screen 'offline' multiplayer co-op modes, for crowding round your television – but ruled out a PC version. Come on George! We reckon an online co-op story mode would be rather spiffing, allowing you and up to 31 other players to take part in linked missions on both the light and dark sides of the Force.




Must. Impress. Man. With. Robotics...

precariously above the raging sea below, while also having to hold the control room in the shiny-floored white surroundings of the base interior. All this while Jango Fett actor Temuera Morrison barks orders at you in his familiar New Zealand drawl. It's actually quite hilarious when you and a dozen other Clones are running and jetting close together towards the next control point, like a *Star Wars* version of Benny Hill.

David Zemke then took us on a virtual tour of some of the other ten planets in *Star Wars Battlefront*, beginning with the never-seen-before Outer Rim ice world of Rhen Var, on to Yavin IV containing the Rebel HQ and finishing with Bespin's Cloud City. "We basically decided that if you're going to do a sky map, this is the best one to use," says Zemke. "It turns into a sky battle with X-Wings and TIE fighters, but you can also touch down on

the platforms and run into rooms to take over spawn points. It changes the nature of the game a little bit." So is there a Death Star map? "No, not in this game. But that'd be a great level, so we'll look at that for a possible future title or expansion."

The version of *Star Wars Battlefront* we played was very much at the pre-Alpha stage, with some rough graphics round the edges and a lack of headset communication support, but it's already immensely playable and we're sure LucasArts will polish the game until it's shinier than C-3PO's ankles. Plus, the fact that *Battlefront* will be launching the same day as the feverishly awaited DVD edition of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, September 21 2004 will go down forever in the Jedi archives as the day responsible for the 'most sickies in a galaxy far, far away...' 

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

GAMING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Perhaps the most fast-moving of the FPS sub-genres, online gaming has evolved from *Quake*-style deathmatch free-for-alls, through to semi-massive games such as *Battlefield 1942* and *Joint Ops*. Naturally enough, this evolution has mirrored the advances in Internet connection speeds, but only with the advent of broadband has the true potential of what can be achieved online been realised.

Counter-Strike was the first to unleash the true potential of teamplay and is arguably the reason why the world of E-Sports – professional gaming clan tournaments and leagues – is on the rise today. This is even reflected by developers, with *Tribes: Vengeance* seemingly geared towards arena play, and the next *Unreal Tournament* streamlining content in that direction.

For most, the future lies in persistent world MMO shooters such as *PlanetSide*. Large-scale warfare provides a gameplay dynamic that's far removed from small team-based skirmishes, but for it to work with any degree of efficiency it needs a greater level of tactical organisation than is currently available. *Battlefield 2*'s 100-player, commander-led battles hint at a

ONLINE GAMEPLAY



Counter-Strike on Source. Will it ever die?

possible template (100- or 1000-player battles feel much the same when you're in the thick of things), although the biggest challenge will be in making players follow orders. Virtual court-martials anyone?

"Arrrrgh, my eye."



Squads of AI men work intelligently with you to capture enemy strongholds.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gray Matter Studios

PUBLISHER Activision

WEBSITE www.callofduty.com

ETA Autumn 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Threatening to be even more epic than the original
- Ten massive new missions
- All-new particle effects system
- Improved AI
- Vehicle-based multiplayer



MAKE NO MISTAKE, *Call Of Duty* was the most visceral, realistic and evocative war simulation ever created. Winning countless awards, developer Infinity Ward's sensitive yet gut-twisting portrayal of WWII conflict was applauded by critics, consumers and even WWII veterans for enabling a whole new generation to experience, and more importantly, never forget the horrors of war. Who said FPS games were bad for you?

Of course, having enjoyed such widespread acclaim, it was only a matter of time till an expansion pack crawled out of the trenches. And wouldn't you know it, one has: *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*. What's more, Gray Matter (of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* fame) is responsible for the coding, so we decided to take a trip to its LA office to see what's in store...

CV



GRAY MATTER STUDIOS

Formed out of Xatrix Entertainment (of *Kingpin* fame), Gray Matter is quickly becoming one of the most respected and talented development teams in the world, despite having released only one PC title under its current guise.

2001 *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, the follow-up to one of the PC's best-loved shooters ships to huge critical acclaim and massive worldwide sales.

United We Stand... CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

Martin Korda takes to the trenches in this stunning follow up to last year's fantastic shooter...

realistic yet brilliantly cinematic, this gargantuan mission dwarfs anything we've seen in *Call Of Duty*, with the level sprawling almost endlessly into the horizon. Doves of American soldiers advance towards incessantly chattering German machine guns, while mortar fire splashes down all around, sending shell-shocked soldiers skywards as they ride plumes of dust kicked up by the

"UO is about that big, cinematic battle feel that makes you believe you're at war"

ROBB ALVEY SENIOR PRODUCER



Deployable machine guns are a new feature in *United Offensive*.



You want cinematic? You got it.

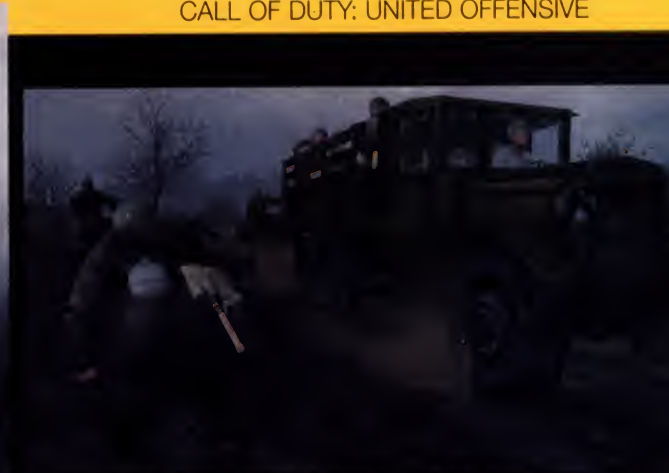
propelled explosives. The all-new particle physics system works overtime to render dust and snow as they fall from the sky, limiting our field of vision and making sniper rifles obsolete. This is face-to-face combat at its most sickening, the Americans eventually winning a bloody, house-by-house battle to recapture the town.

GENERATION X

After recovering our breath, we ask Robb whether there's going to be any movie tie-ins in *UO*, as there were in *Call Of Duty*? "The generation that we're trying to aim the game at have mainly experienced WWII via *Band Of Brothers* and WWII movies," says Robb. "We want to keep connections across multiple media, just like *CoD* did with its *Enemy At The Gates* level, because it pulls in a lot more people. Some levels in *UO* have a pretty direct connection with these, while others have none."

Just like *Call Of Duty, United Offensive* is set to feature three unique campaigns – American, British and Russian – with ten missions in total. Now, we know what you're thinking – this doesn't sound like very many. But having seen the scope of some of these levels, we're pretty confident that *United Offensive* won't be too much shorter than the original, which, let's face it, is a pretty damn good length for an expansion pack.

"We really wanted to focus on creating much bigger maps and creating as much new content as possible. You find yourself playing in huge areas," explains Mike Denny, one of the game's designers. "When we got the tools, we sat down and worked out what we could do with them in the short amount of time we'd been given," adds Robb. "We developed a technique which allowed us to have multiple people working on a map at the same time. This meant we could build much bigger maps than the ones in *CoD*." Judging by this first



A new particle effects system = stunning weather conditions.



What they don't know is that we've replaced their oxygen with Nitrous Oxide...

mission, the team's succeeded in this goal admirably.

So onto mission two of our visit, a novel B17 bomber mission. Part of the British campaign, you play the role of a B17 gunner, repelling countless enemy fighters as they attempt to mince your behemoth plane into shrapnel.

BOMBS AWAY

After a sedate start, the action soon kicks off for real. Spotting enemy fighters in the distance, our escort Spitfires break off from their defensive formation to engage the enemy. The sky

lights up like a Christmas tree as lines of machine-gun fire snake from Bomber turrets in search of enemy targets. All around us is a maelstrom of bullets, fire and smoke as planes buzz below and above like flies around a corpse. An enemy fighter, tail shot off, spirals towards the ground, its fall interrupted by a B17, sliced in half by the impact. The two flying beasts burst into flames, their crews screaming their last desperate wails over the radio.

Throughout the mission, we're forced to change our gunner positions as more and more of our crew members fall under the aerial onslaught. The level ends with our turret being hit and a fall towards earth

UP THE ARSENAL

MORE HARDWARE, MORE MULTIPLAYER. TASTY

Let's face it, no FPS expansion pack would be complete without an array of new weaponry – and *United Offensive* certainly doesn't disappoint on that front. The main new additions to the arsenal are deployable light machine guns such as the American M1919, one of the most efficient and reliable machine guns of WWII. There's also mounted anti-tank weapons and flamethrowers, as well as several other weapons (as yet unannounced).

But that's not all – *United Offensive* is set to have a host of new vehicles to drive, both in the single-player campaigns and in the all-new vehicle-based multiplayer games (although exact details of the latter are yet to be confirmed). So expect to take control of hulking T-34/85 Russian tanks, jeeps, motorbikes and maybe even planes during the nine new multiplayer maps, which we're guessing will be very much akin to the *Battlefield* games. Quite frankly, if the multiplayer games are half as good as the single-player campaign, this expansion pack could easily be two games in one.



behind enemy lines, surely an intriguing setup for the following missions.

However, despite the novelty value and intensity of the bomber mission, it does feel somewhat repetitive after a while, limited by the plane's claustrophobic dimensions that penned us into a narrow metal tube. We ask Robb how Gray Matter came up with the idea for this mission. "One of the most important things for us was to bring something new to *Call Of Duty*. We all decided that having you in a B17 would be really unique and something the player hadn't seen before," he explains.

FINAL PUSH

And so onto the final mission of our *United Offensive* tour of duty, the Battle Of Kursk, from the Russian campaign. Gray Matter has saved the best till last. Imagine the Stalingrad mission from *Call Of Duty*, only even more bloody and bone-shaking, and you have an idea of what this mission has in store.

Kursk is a titanic map that oozes the horror of battlefield combat like a weeping wound. Tired, hungry, out-manned and outgunned Russian conscripts race through trenches teeming with Germans, towards lines of enemy tanks. The adversary, using sickeningly realistic flamethrowers (a Gray Matter trademark), cuts down lines of our comrades, engulfing them in sheets of flames and sending them into a manic dance of death as they flail in an attempt to save themselves. After the flamethrowers come the machine-gun nests, ripping up flesh with merciless bursts of lead. Finally, the remaining handful of our battered men place explosives on German tanks and watch as they light up the gloom like some grotesque fireworks display. It's been an awesome, physically and psychologically exhausting mission.

"We really tried to stick to the CoD ethos: in war, no-one fights alone. We already had great AI to work with and we've just improved on that, in the way your squad works and moves together, how they run through trenches, how they tackle each map and help out the player," explains Robb as the level finishes. He's not wrong.

"We've added extra AI features such as more personality settings and the ability for them to deploy mounted machine guns. There are more character profiles too, so that individual soldiers have their own unique characteristics,

"It really does capture all the moving elements on a battlefield"

JOHN HILLEN MILITARY ADVISER



A typical Saturday night in Barnsley.

such as different sight ranges that change their inner activity," adds Mike.

EXPERT OPINION

Still not convinced? Well, don't just take our word on how realistic *United Offensive* is. Ask John Hillen, military adviser on the game, Desert Storm veteran and regular ABC News and BBC military analyst, who we caught up with later that day.

"There are times when you feel like you're playing in multiplayer mode," says John. "Squads move to mutually support each other, certain weapons systems are engaging at different times as they would in a real battle and men set themselves up in the right kind of firing positions. It really does



Daga-daga-daga-daga-daga. Get some, get some!

capture all the moving elements on a battlefield." Believe us now?

We're not ashamed to admit it, but before we saw *United Offensive* for the first time, we were expecting the worst. After the disappointment of almost every FPS expansion pack we've seen in recent years, it's hardly surprising.

However, *United Offensive* is clearly shaping up to be one of the most ambitious, entertaining and well-designed shooter add-ons ever, one which could even surpass the staggering levels of intensity and action of its predecessor. It's true that war may be hell, but from the looks of it, *United Offensive* is set to be anything but. **PCZ**

Why Don't You?...



Can you feel the love tonight?

BURN BABY BURN!

Even though *United Offensive* is shaping up to be a real winner, there are a few things that'd make it even better. For starters, being able to drop the bombs in the B17 mission would bring some welcome variation to what's currently a fairly limited mission, albeit one that's novel and intense. I know no man fought alone, but sometimes in games you just have to take some liberties.

Another great touch would be if you could shoot the canisters that the flamethrower-toting Germans carry on their backs in the Kursk mission. This would be great, as then they'd explode and consume all those around them in a blanket of fire. It wouldn't be an easy shot to make, but oh-so-satisfying if you pulled it off.

THE FUTURE OF THE FPS...

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION IS THE WATCHWORD

At the moment, you'd be forgiven for thinking that every shooter in existence is either set in disused space stations on the edge of hell, or in the war-torn fields of Second World War-era Europe. Or both.

But don't despair – there's a bright light on the horizon. Development teams are finally wising up to the concept that not every game revolves around Nazis

from Mars. After years of waiting, contemporary settings have become a possibility. The tropics of *Far Cry* are leading the way ahead of the inevitable sequel, and *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is lending our streets a sinister air. Ultimately, you can't escape war (*Call Of Duty 2* is a dead cert), but there's plenty of scope for variety along the way.

SETTINGS



See, it's not all war, war, war.

OUT NOW

BLITZKRIEG

BURNING HORIZON

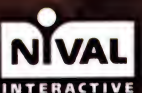


"AGONISING SENSE OF REALISM"
- PCFORMAT

"IT'S BETTER THAN SUDDEN STRIKE"
- WHICH IS NO MEAN FEAT"
- PCZONE



www.blitzkrieg.de





A Nazgoull with an emergency food drop for the orc army.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER EA Pacific

PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE lordoftherings.eagames.com

ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Impressive new visual emotion system
- Totally revamped interface
- Stunning engine with epic battles
- Streamlined resource management, base and unit upgrades
- Could be the first game to do justice to the films

CV



EA PACIFIC

Formed out of Westwood (the developer credited for single-handedly inventing the RTS), *The Battle For Middle-earth* is only EA Pacific's second game. Here's a bit of info about the first one...

2003 *Command & Conquer: Generals*, the first ever 3D C&C game, is released to mixed reactions. While the visuals are infinitely superior to the isometric graphics of its predecessors, the gameplay remains almost identical to every other game in the series.

Elf hazards...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Martin Korda uncovers the latest information
on EA Pacific's jaw-dropping 3D RTS

AFTER the three epic masterpieces that were the *Lord Of The Rings* films, it's somewhat baffling that we've yet to see the release of a PC-only game based around Peter Jackson's trilogy. Which is why we're pinning all our hopes on EA Pacific's beautiful-looking *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-earth*, a 3D RTS that could just prove to be the magical game we've been waiting for. We caught up with Mark Skaggs, executive producer on *The Battle For Middle-earth*, and grilled

him for information about the game like a Hobbit would a pack of juicy sausages.

GOOD TO BE BAD

The first piece of good news is that you'll be able to command both the forces of good and evil, with each campaign's plot unfolding through video sequences that introduce each mission's background story. "For the good side, you get to control the Gondor and Rohan armies as well as the heroes of the Fellowship. Your goal is to defeat the evil armies

across Middle-earth. This includes fighting all the major battles you see in the three films plus a few more," says Skaggs. "For the evil side, you get to control the armies of Isengard and Mordor and you have to get the ring from Frodo and conquer Middle-earth."

However, better still is the news that, having championed the old C&C-style RTS gameplay for so many years under the guise of Westwood, and more recently with its first title *C&C: Generals*, EA Pacific has made it a primary goal to

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
143



The engine looks good enough to eat – get your tongue away from this page.



Come on then if you think you're hard enough.

attempt to bring sweeping and revolutionary changes into *The Battle For Middle-Earth*.

Gone are the cumbersome hours of harvesting materials in pre-defined resource fields, replaced by what could be a far more intuitive and less time-consuming system.

As Skaggs explains: "When you play as one of the good armies, you get food from the farms you build and iron from blacksmiths. You also get treasure from some of the monsters you kill in battles. These resources go into a pool that you use up when you build troops and structures."

Playing as Isengard or Mordor should see a similar system for resource gathering, only this time you amass raw materials via slaughterhouses (food) and furnaces (iron). However, as Skaggs explains, there will be one major difference between the two sides' resource collecting abilities.

"When playing as Isengard, you're able to get wood from cutting down

trees. We put this in because it felt in line with what Isengard did in the movies. We're not allowing the good armies to do this though, because it just feels wrong having them destroying the forests of Middle-earth." Quite right too.

DE-BASEMENT

Base building is also receiving a major overhaul. "We're moving to a 'Camps and Castles' type of base-building system, where each side will have a camp or castle area with pre-determined build plots where they can construct various buildings. By simplifying the process of building bases, we allow players to get to the fun part of producing units and fighting more quickly. It also allows

ALL BAR NONE



The work-in-progress interface: we want screens!

BRAND NEW INTERFACE SET TO MAKE DEBUT – AND IT COULD BE RADICAL

Just when we thought the revamping of the old-skool RTS conventions were over, Skaggs hit us with the details of *The Battle For Middle-Earth*'s all-new interface, which we saw in action at E3. "Early on in the project, we set an aggressive goal to get rid of the traditional bottom and side bars – and we've succeeded," he states proudly. "When you click on a building, a set of circles appears over it, showing what you can build out of it. When you select a unit, you see its status and abilities in the Palantir – a circular interface in the lower left corner. This way, players still get all the functionality of the old interface type, but in a cleaner and more simple-to-understand package."

"The first piece of good news is that you'll be able to command both the forces of good and evil"

us to tailor the look of the bases to fit the rich fiction of Middle-earth. Early play-tests have shown that players think this new way of building bases works really well," states Skaggs.

"We're also moving away from the traditional tech tree concept you've seen in previous RTS



games. Instead, we're adding the concept of Building Veterancy. As you use a building more, it will 'Veteran Up'. Each level of Veterancy brings with it more units and more defensive strengths. The final level of Veterancy also brings some ability for the building to defend itself with archers and the like."

ALL EMOTIONAL

Streamlining the game's resource management, tech tree and base building elements are only the start of EA Pacific's efforts to revolutionise the now archaic C&C RTS model though. If you're a regular reader, you may remember our excitement back in issue 143 when we found out about *TBFME*'s all-new visual emotion system, a feature that depicts the feelings of every unit on the battlefield and their reactions to different situations and opponents. We pressed Skaggs to elaborate on this and give us some more examples of the types of behaviour we're set to see.

"One example would be soldiers quaking in fear when they come face to face with a troll, Balrog or Fell Beast," he explains. "However, beyond fear reactions, you also see cheering in reaction to good events and morale boosts when heroes are near. So for example, it'll be very visible to players that when Aragorn is near, soldiers don't quake in fear at trolls due to the morale bonus he gives them."

And you can expect to see more than your fair share of fully upgradeable heroes too (who gain both experience and new abilities). Plus, all of the main characters from the films – both good and evil – pop up to say hello at some point and no doubt lop off some enemy heads while they're at it.

Skaggs also told us about some of the other units (there'll be a massive 60 unit types in all) that you can expect to either command or come up against during the



Heroes such as Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli are set to make an appearance.

course of the two campaigns, including Warg Riders – the snarling wolf-like orc-carrying beasts that we saw skirmishing with the Riders of Rohan in *The Two Towers*. These rabid, hugely powerful creatures will be both fast and vicious, and are set to carry a 50 per cent probability of surviving if their orc rider is killed, at which point they wreak havoc on the battlefield by indiscriminately attacking any units.

The Elven Warrior should prove to be another of the game's more powerful and versatile units. Akin to the sour-faced saviours of Helm's Deep, they not only excel in archery, but also prove more than a little adept with blades when the enemy is too close for them to use their bows, though Skaggs didn't comment about their ability

to use a plank of wood as a skateboard like Legolas.

HANDY WITH HIS BOW

These pointy-eared killers also receive stealth bonuses in woods, which will help no end when setting up ambushes and taking a much-needed piss after a night on the Elven Ale without worrying about getting nicked by the local rozzers. What's more, if you combine

two groups of Elven Warriors, one forms a sword-bearing frontline, while the other takes up positions directly behind and provides cover with their bows. This proves that while they may have the charisma of a corpse, they're a handy bunch to have around in a scrap.

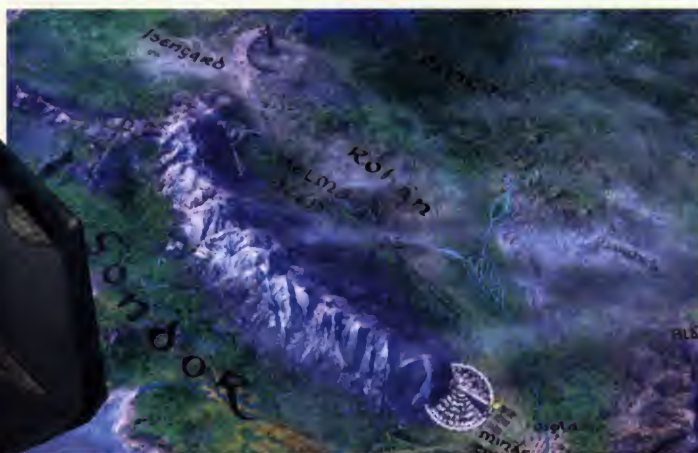
But I know what you're thinking. You want to hear about the actual battles don't you? The bloodbaths, cauldrons of

MULTIPLE CHOICE

BRINGING LIFE AND CHOICE TO MIDDLE-EARTH

Unlike the majority of RTS games, *The Battle For Middle-Earth* is promising to be a non-linear event. This is thanks to a visually lush 'Living World Map' screen that'll allow you to see where all of the game's armies and encampments are situated, as well as choosing which battles you want to fight and in what order.

Rendered in fully 3D detail, you'll be able to zoom into this map and watch humorous animations of individual characters going about their business. This is a feature that'll hopefully add some much-needed character and life to what's often a strategy game's duller screen.



From the Living World Map, you can choose which battle to fight next.



"We're going to have all the battles you see in the films – and more"

MARK SKAGGS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, *TBFME*



Gerry Cottle's circus arrives at Minas Tirith.



With over 60 unit types in all, you'll be spoilt for choice.

battle-scarred bodies where the ring of steel melds with anguished cries as swords meet flesh. So without further delay, let's find out just what's in store in that department.

"We're going to have all the battles you see in the films – and more," claims Skaggs. "There'll also be some battles you didn't see in the film but were alluded to. For example, when Eomer runs into Legolas, Gimli and Aragorn for the first time and he's just been out hunting orcs across Rohan. You get the chance to go on those orc hunts with Eomer."

HOW MANY?

While battles are set to be epic in scale, EA Pacific isn't aiming to compete with the likes of Creative Assembly's *Rome: Total War*, with even the largest skirmishes involving hundreds rather than thousands of troops. Battles will range in size from a handful of heroes fighting off a band of orcs – just like at the end of *The Fellowship Of The Ring* – to full-scale rucks such as Minas Tirith and the battle at the Black Gate of Mordor. However, if you're worried about a lack of scale, check out the cavalry charge from the game's E3 demo (from

last issue's discs), a sight that should ease even the most cynical sceptic's mind.

Tactics are also important to a degree, but in order to keep the game as accessible as possible, *The Battle For Middle-Earth* won't include tactical subtleties such as flanking bonuses. "Height will give you an advantage and so will various formations," explains Skaggs. "Some of the coolest things we're doing are the unit combinations. Some of these give you real-life tactical advantages such as having archers in the back while soldiers provide protection from the front. We've got those morale bonuses too, but we're not going to have fatigue because most people don't see it as fun."

Skaggs also promises plenty of siege warfare, including the battle at Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith. Siege engines, such as siege towers, battering rams, ballistae, catapults and siege ladders are set to play a major role in these encounters, with gates and walls buckling and crumbling under their incessant onslaught.

"We're going to have game versions of Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith,"

Why Don't You?...

LET MULTIPLAYER BATTLE COMMENCE... BUT WITH NO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

While Skaggs wouldn't divulge any specifics about the game's multiplayer modes – though we know there's been talk of a story-based multiplayer campaign – we thought we'd just go ahead and put forward a suggestion anyway. How about a *Total War*-like multiplayer battle mode, where you and an opponent must allocate a pre-defined set of resource points to a massive army, before placing them on a battlefield and going head-to-head in all-out war. The engine certainly looks up to it, and let's face it, big battles are what *The Lord Of The Rings* is all about. Go on EA Pacific, give it a try – you might like it.



More elephants from *Rome: Total War*.

continues Skaggs. "You'll be able to fall back and move within them just like in the films, but we've had to modify them in some ways to make for better RTS gameplay. They're proving to be among the biggest challenges we have in terms of engineering and design. Rest assured though, early versions of them are very cool." Let's hope he's right, because a well-designed siege warfare element could potentially give *The Battle For Middle-Earth* the edge over many of its competitors. However conversely, if EA Pacific gets the balance wrong, it could prove to be the game's downfall too.

These two distinct types of battles – open warfare and siege – should hopefully provide you with two totally different gaming experiences. "With the fortresses, we're recreating an interactive version of the battles players

have seen in the films and they'll be different than the 'Base On Base' type of battles you've seen in previous RTS games. Battles in the open will be more like traditional RTS games, but because of the innovations we've done with base building, resource gathering and how units work, you're going to get new experiences with those battles as well," concludes Skaggs.

BRING IT ON

Judging by his words, the recent E3 presentation and the appearance of these gorgeous screenshots, it looks like our wait for a top quality *The Lord Of The Rings* game could be about to come to an end. And if EA Pacific delivers on all its promises, this could prove to be one of the finest strategy games of 2004. The battle for 3D RTS supremacy is about to begin... [E3]

are under attack!



Multiplayer will support up to eight players. Bagsy I'm not the French.

The longest play... D-DAY

The Germans are still the first to lay their minefields on the beach, finds **Steve O'Hagan**

BEFORE THE Allies could plan for an invasion of Hitler's Fortress Europe in 1944, they first had to defeat the Axis armies in North Africa. Similarly, developer Monte Cristo has only turned its attention to the D-Day landings having first produced the competent if derivative WWII RTS *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps* (issue 141, 70 per cent).

This follow-up, which uses the same basic engine and gameplay mechanics,

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
WEBSITE www.d-daygame.com
ETA August 20

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the people who brought you *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps*
- Smart-looking 3D engine brings the strategy to life
- Missions modelled on actual events and locations
- Fast and fun rather than in-depth and studious

covers the whole campaign in Normandy, from the initial airborne assaults, through the beach landings, to the battles that resulted in the destruction of the German Army in France.

Obviously trained on the same drill square as most of its WWII RTS predecessors, *D-Day* is a well-presented affair that sacrifices realism for excitement and comic book derring-do. The three single-player campaigns (all played on the Allied side) are loaded with events and encounters from just about every D-Day film or TV show every made, including special tips of the helmet to *Band Of Brothers* and *The Longest Day*. For an added dash of authenticity, the developers have modelled many of the maps on aerial photographs taken during the war, and scouted out many of the locations for themselves.

Battles can range from using a handful of scattered parachute troops to overpower an enemy coastal battery, to commanding a sprawling invasion force consisting of tanks, armoured cars,

infantry and airpower. The smaller scale missions give more scope for exploiting the special abilities of many of the infantry – sappers clearing mines, scouts sneaking up ahead and snipers annihilating machine-gun nests at range – as well as placing a greater emphasis on keeping troops alive. The larger scale battles put the emphasis on multitasking, as you attempt to manage anything up to a hundred-odd little chaps and an array of supporting machines of war.

Updated since *Desert Rats*, the impressive engine now boasts 3D realism right down to the clumps of grass and the shimmering water. Smoke-belching tanks rumble around with scant regard for obstacles, with trees, telegraph poles and walls all crushed beneath their tracks. Artillery pieces recoil as they fire, and the plumes of fire, smoke and debris their shells create on impact look meaty.

“3D realism right down to the clumps of grass and the shimmering water”

Call in airpower to break enemy lines.



Create your own multiplayer melees.



There are over 60 units available.



England in their diamond formation.

What will concern veterans of strategy gaming – especially *Sudden Strike* or *Blitzkrieg* – is quite how uniform this is shaping up to be. From the interface layout, to the hotkeys, to the structure of the missions and the style of tactics, *D-Day* is clearly a title not looking to break the mould. Whether this is a good or bad thing will be down to you – whether you are already suffering from battle fatigue, or whether your lust for Boys' Own-style combat is as fierce as it ever was. [22]



Mont Blanc, complete with rudely disinterested French crowd.



"Let's off-road!"



Admire nature's beauty.



You're penalised for hitting people.

Burns baby, Burns...

RICHARD BURNS RALLY

Jamie Sefton doesn't know his rollbar from his dampers, but that doesn't mean he can't enjoy this ultra-realistic driving sim

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Warthog
PUBLISHER SCI
WEBSITE www.richardburnsrally.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Hardcore rally driving sim
- Involvement of Richard Burns and co-driver Robert Reid
- Realistic driving model with infinitely tweakable tuning
- Real-time random weather that affects handling



It's going to be chilly without that car door.



AS YODA wisely once said: "You must unlearn what you have learned." This is certainly the case for *Richard Burns Rally*, which on initial viewings could convince you into thinking that this is just a *Colin McRae* clone – but that couldn't be further from the truth. To master this game you have to forget about the arcade pick-up-and-play aesthetic of Codemasters' classic series and drive with a completely new attitude. *Richard Burns* is Hardcore with a capital 'H', stamped into concrete and embossed with 18-carat gold leaf lettering.

BACK TO SCHOOL

To prove the point, developer Warthog has included a fully comprehensive Rally School, where you can get a vital feel for the different handling of the seven cars – such as a Subaru Impreza and Hyundai Accent – learn how to brake safely and advanced techniques such as the use of the camber of the road to guide you round corners. At the end of class, if you've been good (and given him a shiny red apple), Mr Burns even takes you for a high-speed passenger ride around a course to show you how it's done.

After you've figured out where the accelerator and brake are, you can take part in either a quick rally, a multiplayer game for up to four players, or a Richard Burns Challenge against his ghost car in one of the six courses around the globe, including snow-covered Rovaniemi in Finland and dusty sun-baked Canberra, Australia.

However, it's the Rally Season mode that can really bring out the Sunday mechanic in you, allowing your team of engineers in overalls to fiddle with everything from the car's rear differential torque to wheel axis inclination. Also, each stage has random weather, so you have to make sure that you have the right tyres before you leave the garage or you'll be slipping and sliding around more than Emile Heskey.

SURFACE TENSION

Rallying is seat-of-your-pants stuff – you can't just slam the pedal to the floor and hope to stay on the road, as any slight clip of a tree stump at 140kmh will flip the car and send you crashing off-course. You have to strike a balance between being as fast as you can, listening intently to



What happens if you drive too fast in *Richard Burns Rally*.

Richard Reid's pace-notes, while maintaining cool control of the car, which reacts to every rut, bobble and debris on the road surface.

Unlike *Colin McRae Rally*, if you get into trouble off-road, you have to call for help and a group of yellow jersey-wearing officials (who you can also accidentally hit) will help get your car back in action. Finally, after you finish a stage, you only have a limited time to repair any damage,

so you have to take advice on which essential parts you need to replace or you may have to start the next rally event with a completely crocked vehicle.

This is the most original rally title I've played for some time, as it genuinely offers a new driving experience, but we'll have to wait until the review next month to see whether the painstaking attention to detail proves to be hellishly addictive or just downright exhausting. **PCZ**



7/24

All aboard for the riverboat ride of a lifetime! A very short lifetime.

Some day, this war's gonna end...

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

Yesterday, *Will Porter* finally ran out of 'Nam movie quotes to use in previews. To taunt him we sent him back into a world of pain

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pivotal Games
PUBLISHER SCI
WEBSITE www.pivotalgames.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the new outing for the immensely popular *Conflict* series
- Authentic 1960s soundtrack and great ambience
- Interesting level design and set pieces
- Streamlined squad dynamics
- Charlie don't surf

SHOVE A copy of *Conflict: Desert Storm* into the line of sight of most games journalists and they'll invariably blow air into their cheeks and make a noise like 'Meh'. Lovingly display it in the window of your local games emporium, however, and just watch the kids go wild: they bay, they howl, they paw at the windows – all desperate to propel *Conflict's* brand of streamlined squad-shootery up

to the top of the charts. 'The kids' don't know everything (just look at Dairylea Lunchables), but they know what they like, and to sate their addiction the *Conflict* boys are about to provide another famous outing of US foreign diplomacy for their delectation. So let's all say a big hello to *Conflict: Vietnam*.

HELLO

In an extensive play of some early code, we became thoroughly embroiled in the game's tale of four Vietnam stereotypes trapped behind enemy lines: the green rookie, the had-enough-of-this-shit veteran, the hick and the black guy, fighting their way through the undergrowth in the knowledge that the



Vietnamese curling: always a show-stopper.



Too much rice wine... I think he's pissed, Sarge.

raging Tet offensive has cut off the chances of any airlift rescue. Aimed to land somewhere between the painstaking command structure of games like *Rainbow Six* and the 'stand by that burning car and pull the trigger' approach of EA's fun-packed *Freedom Fighters*, this *Conflict* epistle allows you

to switch between the roles of heavy gunner, sniper, light gunner and medic while issuing all manner of 'snipe that chap', 'heal that soldier', 'blow up that gun emplacement' orders. The command system itself has been pretty streamlined since *Conflict*'s Iraqi efforts and there's a lot less keyboard tapping. A mere depression of the right mouse button, a selection of a squad member and a look in the right direction will do the majority of your dirty work. The game is now more attuned to realise that you're unlikely to send Cherry the medic to heal a grumpy Vietcong sniper, and so saves you some fiddly tapping by automatically knowing that you want to deliver bloody death – so bloody death comes a lot more swiftly.

A LOT MORE GREEN

The biggest challenge for Pivotal must have been using a retooled *Conflict* engine and jamming the *Desert Storm* experience (where there's a lot of sand and no trees) into Vietnam (where there are a lot of trees and no sand). The results are fairly satisfactory, although it's true to say that there's nothing on offer here that gets even close to the

MESSING ABOUT ON THE RIVER

DISCOVER WATERWAYS EVEN MORE TERRIFYING THAN THE NORFOLK BROADS

It's an unwritten law that every shooter must include some form of shooting from a moving vehicle, but we quite like *Conflict: Vietnam*'s variation on the theme. It isn't as stupidly easy as ones we've played before, it's quite nice to jump between your different men and the setting of the waterways of a Vietnamese town is certainly a novel and imposing one. (Even if it is quite convenient that the vessel needs repairing just when there's a horde of angry natives appearing on the rooftops.)



There's nothing quite like messing around in boats.

"Venture along jungle trails, through ramshackle villages and the ruins of ancient temples, down into VC tunnels and trenches"



Here's some locals I slaughtered earlier...

jungles we've seen in *Far Cry* or even *Battlefield: Vietnam* – we should perhaps bear in mind that this is a simultaneous console release so the visuals were never likely to set your graphics card alight. Explosions are satisfyingly meaty though, never straying too far towards Hollywood extravagance, and the impression of dense jungle is certainly conveyed – even if the game doesn't allow you to run around willy-nilly as other jungle shooters do. There's occasionally more than one path to follow (a hidden track path or a creek

that you can wade through might be discovered and provide a parallel route towards the level's main focus), but otherwise action proceeds in a pretty linear fashion. You'll be venturing along jungle trails, through ramshackle villages, among the ruins of ancient temples and down into VC tunnels and trenches – with your escapades being punctuated by some excellently designed set pieces.

My dalliance with the preview code started off with a lot of huffing and puffing on my part (perhaps because I

CV

PIVOTAL
GAMES

PIVOTAL GAMES

Hailing from Bath and with a 70-strong workforce beaver away in a converted barn, Pivotal is truly an SCI success story.

2000 Formed from the ashes of Pumpkin Studios, responsible for *WarZone 2100*, Pivotal Games leaps into existence. Work begins on the *Conflict: Desert Storm* engine.

2002 September's release of *Conflict: Desert Storm* provides a new angle on the squad shooter, and the game rockets up to the number one slot.

2003 *The Great Escape* and *Conflict: Desert Storm II* are released to lukewarm criticism, and the happiness of cash registers everywhere.

14/0



Blue Vietnamese mountain goats again – too much acid!

felt that *Conflict*'s spiritual home was located a lot closer to my living room floor than my office-bound gaming powerhouse) but some of the situations that the game threw at me really started to reel me in. A seemingly obedient village, for example, luring you in before suddenly sprouting snipers and rampaging militia intent on gunning you down.

My favourite moment, however, came with the start of the Tet offensive; the point at which the facility you've been pottering about in and doing your training is suddenly invaded by hordes of North Vietnamese trouble-makers. Fighting your way back to the giant, circular, high ground at the centre of the US military compound is all great scripted fun, with VC leaping into your trenches left right and centre and providing some neat surprises.

The climax comes with the defence of the central, circular compound – marking the VC entrapments with red smoke grenades and watching helicopters swoop in and torch the flood of enemies.

Matters are made slightly more frenetic meanwhile, with the appearance of an enemy tank – and with three of my men grounded by bullet wounds it was a truly tense moment that saw my medic bombarded by bullets and shells, crawling across exposed ground to revive a stricken Hoss who I had equipped with a rocket-launcher and was therefore my only hope in incapacitating the roving tank. I succeeded, but was later summarily brought back down to earth when I mistimed my red smoke-marking of the final enemy incursion point, highlighting instead the surviving US



Grunting male homoeroticism not included.



Hoss attempts to save the day.

troops and watching them hurled far into the air by their own air support.

Pivotal clearly wants you to develop a stronger attachment to your allocated foot soldiers than in its previous efforts, so as well as the story and the in-squad bickering there's an RPG-lite feature that crops up between missions. Here you can tinker with your troops' abilities, so if you want to turn your medic into a gung-ho, cigar-chomping machine-gunner then you can – as long as he's racked up enough points on his travels through the wilderness.

Another thing to keep your eye on is ammunition – you're trapped behind enemy lines so your army-issue bullets increase in value the further you go into a game, and you often have to abandon them altogether and fight instead with pilfered North Vietnamese weaponry. I've

O DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING?

MAGIC MEDICS MEAN THAT TROUBLESOME BULLET WOUNDS ARE A THING OF THE PAST

Conflict: Vietnam isn't a realistic game, it's a fun shooter – so when your men get shot to bits you've got a minute to get them medical attention rather than automatically calling for a bodybag. Anyone can heal, although Cherry the medic is your best bet for a more effective patch-up. This leads to some extremely tense moments, especially when half your team are wasted by a grenade or a rocket launcher. You only get an extremely limited amount of quicksaves for each level, and when the onus lands on one of your men to have a Lazarus effect on his team-mates and fend off the NVA, things get pretty heated.



"Is he gonna make it, doc? Give it to me straight..."



“An RPG-lite feature allows you to turn your medic into a gung-ho, cigar-chomping machine-gunner”



6/24

USA: 1, man in black pyjamas: 0.

SAVE US



CAMPAIGN FOR THE ABOLITION OF UNDUE GAME JOURNALIST CREATIVITY

The time has come. It's official: we've run out of Vietnam movie quotes to use when we're writing about 'Nam shooters. Our quills have become dry. In the past year there has been such a flood of Vietnam shootery that we've run them all – from 'Git Some' to 'The Horror' to 'Alabama Black Snake', no stone has remained unturned. By the time that *Men Of Valor* comes out we'll probably have to write an entire couple of pages without a single, solitary nod to *Apocalypse Now*. Just imagine that terrifying possibility. We may even have to start writing our headlines with *no outside help whatsoever* – the consequences of which could be fatal.

But you can help us. You can make a difference. You can stem this tide. If the ZONE readership simply goes out and watches some forgotten 'Nam films like *Bat*21*, *Braddock: Missing in Action III*, *Go Tell the Spartans* or *Archibald The Rainbow Painter*, then we can start anew. A fresh canvas will be created on which we can weave our art. We'll have a whole range of new much-loved films to plunder and our jobs will be saved. We may never have to think with our own minds ever again. Save us dear reader, you're our only hope.

does *Conflict: Vietnam* slot itself into the Saigon vibe? Well first off there are the obvious routes – such as having a level based on an *Apocalypse Now*-style patrol boat, staging the game's opening chapters in the aforementioned military base and ramming a mix of profanity and 'Nam jargon into your squad's filthy chit-chat. Look a bit closer, however, and you'll realise there's also some genuine ingenuity going on here. For a start there's the traps – if you're sauntering through the undergrowth and sparing little attention to the well-being of your squad, then a hidden wire or mine will ignite your point-man before a comrade has got beyond screaming the 'Boo!' syllable of 'Booby trap!'. Elsewhere, when searching for a downed helicopter and extremely low on ammo, I was absolutely delighted to come across a neat pile of grenades and rifles in a quiet jungle clearing – but markedly less delighted when I rushed over to grab

them and was met only by the unexpected detonation of the explosives hidden underneath them by a clever VC. Another neat touch, meanwhile, is when you blow away an enemy and wander over to inspect the damage you've caused, only for Charlie's last dying act being to roll over and reveal a freshly primed grenade sitting at your feet – provoking all manner of swearing and frantic order-giving.

Conflict: Vietnam certainly seems to be capitalising on the gameplay opportunities presented by the grubby chaos of 'Nam – whether you're running away from a friendly napalm strike or trying to lock a shot onto a hidden sniper. The victor of the battle of the Vietnam shooters is still far from revealed, but we're warning to *Conflict: Vietnam* (maybe it's the cute Vietnamese goats that have swayed us) but our expectations have certainly been raised. [E]

Junior was devastated that he'd been nominated for almost certain death.



The game's tutorial level takes place in the US military base.

lost count of the times while playing the preview code that I've gathered my men together before a major confrontation and discovered that all they have to offer in the way of firepower is two rifle rounds, a few pistol bullets, a knife and a paperclip. Ammo conservation and distribution is something that has to be addressed on even the easiest of modes,

and those who foolishly leave their grunts with full permission to blast away at anything even mildly threatening will start to rue their wasteful habits.

TIME TO BLEED

But this isn't just any conflict – this is 'Nam. The poster-boy skirmish for grit, grunts and guerrilla nastiness; so how

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

SLIM PICKINGS



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Anthony Holden

▲ Ah, what an innocent time it was. The fresh flush of youth in our cheeks, the naive spring in our step, the childish certainty that everything would be OK in the morning if we just squeezed our eyes shut tight and went to sleep...

I'm talking of course about last month. At the time, I thought things couldn't get any worse at the PC ZONE reviews desk, with only two genuine triple-A contenders and a bunch of also-rans in the mix.

Oh, how wrong I was. I mean: *Alias*? *Kreed*? *Gooka*? What is this wretched tripe? In a humiliating turn of events for the PC hardcore, we've only been partially saved thanks to a console conversion from the developer of big-breasted slash 'em up *Drakan*. It's called *The Suffering* (see page 66), and it wasn't even a blip on our radar until it showed up a couple of weeks back and scared three shades of marmite out of us. Putting the likes of Konami and Capcom to shame, Surreal Software has created one of the freshest horror-action games in years, and you'd do well to check it out.

Needless to say, of course, this month is one of those 'calm before the storm' moments, as the next few months are almost stupidly packed with potential blockbusters. Starting with a bang next issue, the next three months promise the likes of *Doom 3*, *Ghost Recon 2*, *Star Wars Battlefront*, *Rome: Total War*, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *The Sims 2.0*, *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*, *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-Earth*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* and of course *Half-Life 2*, of which there is currently no news.

It's likely to be an absolute bloodbath at retail, and some of the smaller players are bound to get lost in the confusion; but as always, we'll be here to guide you through it. Until then, be strong: the drought is almost over.



THE SUFFERING 66

Console conversion in 'really quite good' shocker! Find out how good on page 66.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2004*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?
2. Whose suffering have you gained the most pleasure from this month?



DAVE WOODS

TOCA 2 and *Thief 3*

The middle-aged women on Henman Hill, cloaked in their ridiculous homemade Union Jack T-shirts and panties



JAMIE SEFTON

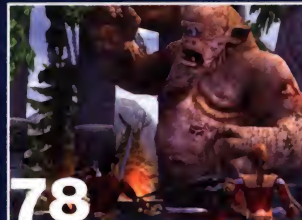
Star Wars Battlefront, *Defender* and *Robotron*
George Bush, as he received a harsh kicking from Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*



74

KREED

Bad Russian shooter alert!



78

SPELLFORCE

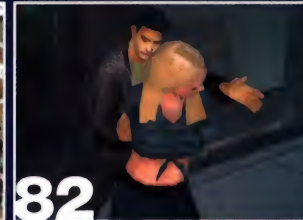
The strategy hybrid gets an add-on



80

REPLAY

The latest budget titles rated



82

FEEDBACK

Unleash your wrath!

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

66 **THE SUFFERING**

70 **CHAOS LEAGUE**

72 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2004**

73 **ALIAS**

74 **KREED**

77 **GOOKA: THE MYSTERY OF JANATRIS**

77 **TWO THRONES**

78 **SPELLFORCE: THE BREATH OF WINTER**

78 **BATTLE FOR TROY**

80 **REPLAY**

INCLUDING COMBAT MISSION ANTHOLOGY, ROBIN HOOD: LEGEND OF SHERWOOD, Z: STEEL SOLDIERS, MASTER OF ORION III, THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL, STARTOPIA AND MANY MORE

82 **FEEDBACK**

OUR REVIEWS MAY BE THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS, BUT EVEN WE'RE WILLING TO LISTEN TO CRITICISM – OR HIGH PRAISE...



CHAOS LEAGUE 70



SNOOKER 2004 72



ALIAS 73



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Joint Ops and Thief 3

That smug little oik Cristiano Ronaldo as he blubbed his piggie eyes out in front of the whole world



PAUL PRESLEY

Joint Ops, City Of Heroes, Final Fantasy XI Online

Evil-doers everywhere as Doctor Gravitus fights the forces of darkness (cough)



WILL PORTER

Joint Ops and yes, Max Payne 2

This month's work experience kids, Ian and Dom, as they did all the shit I usually have to do around here



MARTIN KORDA

Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII

All the innocent animals who died to provide my monthly meat quotient



STEVE HILL

Pro Evolution Soccer 3, World Championship Snooker 2004

Kate Moss at Glastonbury – a malfunctioning firework, long story...



MICHAEL FILBY

Star Wars Galaxies and Codename: Panzers beta

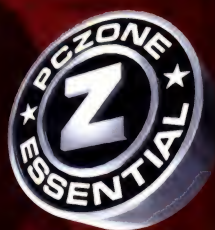
A fat guy at Alton Towers who had to get off Oblivion after five staff members were unable to force the harness around his gut



This guy's just lost a fight with a Mainliner. And the fashion police by the look of it.



Dr Killjoy I presume...



THE SUFFERING

■ £24.99 | Pub: Midway | Dev: Surreal Software | ETA: July 16 | www.thesuffering.midway.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Blood, swearing and blind panic – Michael Filby discovers the computer game equivalent to press day in the PC ZONE offices...

THE SURVIVAL

horror genre is, ironically, in serious danger of dying on its arse. The seemingly never-ending slew of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games have proven to be little more than globs of increasingly prettier graphics wrapped around the same clunky and limited control mechanism, with a handful of shit puzzles thrown in. So, you'd be forgiven for running a mile as soon as you learn that

The Suffering is not only from this less-than-venerable genre, but is also a (grits teeth) console port. Don't be so hasty though – it's actually pretty damn hot.

You see, unlike the aforementioned titles, *The Suffering* does away with everything that works against you. No more clunky controls, obtuse puzzles, two bullets to last you the whole game and, the worst offender of all, fixed

camera views designed to hide half of the action. Instead, this title offers a fast and fluent control system that could've been made for the mouse and keyboard, and heaps of violent, gun-toting action, yet still manages to preserve strong horror elements.

GOING DOWN

The adventure is set in the dingy Abbott State Penitentiary, an Alcatraz-style maximum



At least this guard will die happy.

INPERSPECTIVE

MANHUNT

Reviewed Issue 143, Score 74%
Rockstar's gritty survival gore-fest puts more emphasis on stealth than all-out action, but soon becomes repetitive and a little boring.

MAX PAYNE 2

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 93%
It may be shorter, but it's certainly sweeter – a mixture of spot-on controls and glorious bullet-time makes *Max Payne* the pinnacle of third-person shooters.

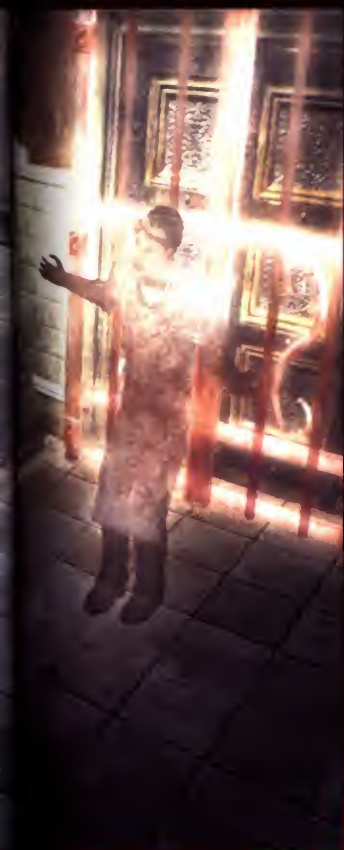
INNER DEMON

WHEN A REALLY BIG GUN JUST ISN'T ENOUGH

As well as having access to some serious weaponry, a short way into the game you find out that Torque has another little trick up the sleeves of his, erm, vest. As you dispose of the enemy, a small 'insanity meter' fills in the corner of the screen. When full, pushing C transforms Torque into a hulking great demon capable of tearing apart anything in its path. You have to remember to keep an eye on the insanity meter as it ticks back down though, as not transforming back into human form results in death. How Torque acquired such an interesting ability is only lightly touched upon, but has something to do with his 'beast within' and all that nonsense. Excessive use of the demon can affect which ending you get when it's all over, but it's pretty easy to get through the game without using it too much if you don't want to.



"Don't make me angry" etc etc.



The Slayers pop up everywhere.

MEET THE HELLBOYS

THERE'S A METHOD TO THE MADNESS OF THESE HORRIFIC GITS



The Slayers are the most commonly encountered beasts – and the easiest to kill. They start to regenerate in later levels though, so make sure you blow their heads off when they're down.



The Mainliners are an absolute pain in the arse, flicking their dirty needles at you left, right and centre. Keep strafing to avoid their projectiles, and hammer the mouse button to shake them off if they grab hold of you.



Burrowers are sneaky little sods, but are easy to deal with once you get the knack. The trick is to select a powerful weapon such as the shotgun, and stand still. Turn on the spot to keep facing the tunnelling critter then, when it surfaces, let him have it. In the face.

"Using a clever mix of graphic and sound tricks along with atmospheric set-pieces, an air of foreboding is quickly built"

security facility located on the isolated Carnate Island. A new prisoner, Torque, is led into his temporary residence in death row – an honour attributable to being convicted for the murder of his family, despite him having no memory of the events that took place. An earthquake then triggers the start of a nightmare as the lights flicker out, and the all-swearing cast start dying in the dark.

FEET FIRST

You jump into the shoes of Torque, at least until he takes them off so he can run around

in a dirty vest and bare feet in the truest *Die Hard* fashion. The opening portion of the game plays out like *Half-Life*, but with considerably ramped up gore. The first weapon you find is even a crowbar, although Gordon Freeman never had to pull his out of the chest of a convict, prompting the hapless soul to scream in agony before choking and dying.

Several set-pieces play out, gradually cranking up the tension before introducing the first

of the splendidly-designed monsters that were created by Hollywood's Stan Winston. Your first encounter is with a Slayer – a hideous beast with razor-sharp swords for arms and legs that make a chilling chink against any surface they scuttle against. You're later introduced to such beauties as the Mainliners – pathetic creatures who leap up and stab you with a

poisoned syringe given half the chance – along with Riflemen, Hangmen and Burrowers.

Thankfully, you've got more than a mean-looking pair of overlong sideburns to point at them. In addition to dual-revolvers, a tommy-gun and a meaty shotgun, on all but the hardest difficulty levels you also find loads of ammo to keep the hordes at bay. There's also the odd machine-gun emplacement dotted around which you'd be a fool not to jump onto quickly, as they're usually positioned next to mass spawn points.

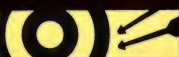
FRYING TONIGHT

The Suffering relies on more than waves of monsters to provide its thrills, though. Using a clever combination of graphic and sound tricks coupled with atmospheric set-pieces, an air of foreboding is quickly built and never relents until the finale. For example, Torque's sanity is far from stable



Horace is a bright spark in the game.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Not the most hygienic toilet we've ever seen.

WHEN IS AN FPS NOT AN FPS?

Although the folk at Surreal Software have kindly offered the option to switch to a first-person perspective, it's hard to find a reason for its inclusion. The game was designed as a third-person shooter so, consequently, switching to the first-person mode never feels quite right. It would've been great if the developer had tweaked the control mechanism and included some FPS-specific sections to take better advantage of this. Crawling through some claustrophobic vents while rats come tearing towards your face in the first-person perspective would have ramped up the immersiveness to bladder-bursting levels.

throughout much of the adventure, as indicated by unsettling hallucinations of his dead wife and children popping up and crying out for his help.

Another stroke of genius is evident in the interaction with other characters. For example, when you encounter a nervous prison guard who suggests you team up with him, a soothing female voice whispers through the left speakers: "He's frightened and he needs your help." However, then an evil voice rasps through the right speakers: "He's a weak

coward and deserves to die – kill him now!" If you let the people you meet live, they sometimes help you out by showing you short-cuts and by providing covering fire.

Your choices in this respect hold even deeper ramifications though, as they help to determine which of the three endings you see – and there are plenty of decisions that affect this throughout the game.

You play *The Suffering* predominantly in third-person – you can switch to first-person, but we wouldn't recommend

Hallucinations star your dead family. Nice.

it (see 'Missed Opportunity', left). In third-person it draws a lot of parallels with *Max Payne 2*, right down to using bottles of painkillers to replenish health, but such inspirations certainly don't count against it. The graphics are solid throughout, belying their console origins with a decent set of gloomy lighting effects (particularly from your torch) and well-detailed textures.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE GAME

As far as atmosphere goes, it's the sound that seals the deal. Hearing the familiar metal-scraping sound of a Slayer scuttling around the ceiling out of your torch's cone of light is unnerving in the extreme. Plus, there are countless little scrapings and scratchings in the game that make you whip around and empty your gun (as well as your bowels), only to find there's nothing there. If

"The Suffering manages to be both genuinely scary and full of hugely enjoyable trigger-happy action"

ever a game is screaming out for a surround sound set-up, this is it – and then some.

As great as *The Suffering* is though, it's not completely devoid of problems. We encountered the odd glitch – one where we managed to get stuck on a piece of scenery, prompting a reload. The controls also don't feel quite as smooth as those of Mr Payne's masterpieces, although this is only really noticeable during the needlessly awkward jumping and climbing sections.

Probably the biggest problem, however, lies in the lack of variety in the game's enemies and locations. A feeling of repetitiveness definitely creeps in during the final third, and this is a real downer if you're replaying for alternate endings.

Nevertheless, *The Suffering* remains a triumph. By

managing to be both genuinely scary (a phrase over-used but well-deserved here) and full of hugely enjoyable trigger-happy action, it plants a shiny size-15 boot right up the arse of the survival-horror genre. *The Suffering* is gory, foul-mouthed fun and deadlier than a package deal to Basra.

PCZONE VERDICT

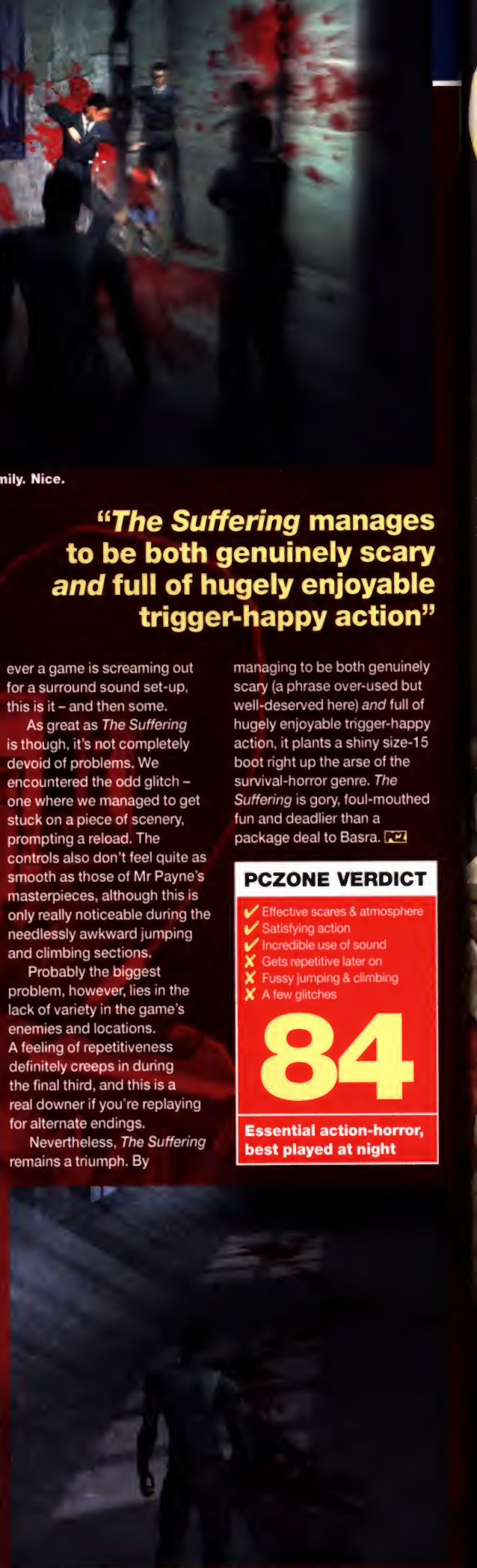
- ✓ Effective scares & atmosphere
- ✓ Satisfying action
- ✓ Incredible use of sound
- ✗ Gets repetitive later on
- ✗ Fussy jumping & climbing
- ✗ A few glitches

84

Essential action-horror, best played at night



Don't lose your head. (Sorry...)



The lighting effects add to the atmosphere greatly.

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CHAOS LEAGUE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Cyanide | ETA: August 6 | www.chaosleaguegame.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card

Another summer of sport passes without triumph, but in *Richie Shoemaker's* fantasy world, there's still much to celebrate...



Millwall vs Cardiff has nothing on this.

"ENGLAND can take solace from the fact that they defended like lions." How often have you heard words like that after our boys have been unfairly dumped from a major sporting tournament? We was robbed of course, and the Portuguese know it. Yet had the game been *Chaos League* and not football the players might have taken solace in a different way – by bundling them to the ground and kicking their smug Portuguese teeth in.

INPERSPECTIVE

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 90%

Probably the greatest sports simulation of all time, though not ideally suited to PC.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%

Not the most sporting of games, but the latest Blizzard offering should sate all your fantasy-action needs.



Let's not mince words – this is not a pretty game.

This is what sets *Chaos League* apart from other sports games: that one can take some pleasure from defeat. Take, for example, a recent trouncing I took from a team of Wood Elves calling themselves The Inquisitors – two minutes before the final whistle, with the game clearly beyond retrieval, I changed tactics and ordered my team to start laying into the opposition, specifically those reeling about on the floor. I eventually lost the game 8-2, with half my team sent off for ungentelemanly conduct.



"You'll soon be positioning players and pulling off daring passes like an elven Arsene Wenger"

Jug-handles that put Master Rooney to shame.



Give monsters the ball and they'll bowl through the opposition.

Promotion to a higher division seemed unlikely after this, but even more so for the Elves, who lost two players to fatal injuries in that game alone. Not a bad season, all things considered.

STUMPED

If you haven't figured it out by now, *Chaos League* is a sports game set in a high fantasy world – heavily inspired by the old Games Workshop board game Bloodbowl, but with enough differences to avoid a lawsuit.

As such, it's not just the wilful violence that sets *Chaos League* apart from *FIFA* et al. Teams of humans, dwarves, elves, the

undead and dog-like Praetorians regularly square off across the pitch, often complemented by ogres, trolls and other assorted über-beasts. It's reminiscent of Spectrum duffer *Peter Beardsley's International Soccer* in that respect, but the means to score are very much different.

For a start, the basis of the game is American Football, with cheerleaders, odd-shaped balls and touchdowns in evidence, and throwing definitely favoured (at least where the ball is concerned). As you'd expect, it's pretty much a case of anything goes once the action starts, with players setting about

one another viciously with arms, legs and stumps. The crowd love it, and if you pull off a succession of impressive scores, or lay out a number of the opposition, they'll reward you by pelting the opposition players, and may even endow you with special powers.

Spells are also favoured by certain teams – the Elves especially, who can launch lightning strikes to knock out a player for a brief time. Other abilities allow you to slow down the game, launch more powerful attacks or cast a portion of the pitch into darkness to support a sneaky run down the flank.

Magical powers may have no place in regular sports, as Uri Geller can testify, but in *Chaos League* they complement the unfair action and fantasy setting perfectly and can turn the tide of a game in an instant.

MAKING THE PLAY

So far, *Chaos League* might sound like some Tolkien-endorsed version of NFL, minus the rules. It is, however, leagues away from what you'd expect from the likes of EA. With a control system lifted directly from a real-time strategy game, *Chaos League* is a tactical sports game rather than an action-oriented one. It takes a few games to get your head around the concept, but with a little perseverance you'll soon be positioning players, cueing up spells and pulling off daring passes like an elven Arsene Wenger.

The AI of your players is minimal – they'll generally stand around picking their teeth unless you tell them to do something – which means the onus is on you to manage your team precisely. Luckily, given the tight playing area and small number of units on hand this is eminently achievable, and you can produce some pretty cunning strategies if you put your mind to

ON THE BUTTON

DO YOU LIKE A CLUTTERED INTERFACE WITH LOTS OF ICONS? IF SO, YOU'RE GOING TO LOVE *CHAOS LEAGUE*. HERE'S WHAT IT ALL MEANS...



- 1 The main view, obviously, where all the action takes place.
- 2 Here are your active team members. The red bar represents health, green is stamina. The stats of the selected units are displayed to the right.
- 3 The green line here tells you whether you're pleasing the crowd. As the line builds, special abilities can be called into play.
- 4 Here you can call in the team doctor, bribe the ref (especially if he's Swiss) or slow down the game.
- 5 This shows the spells available for the currently selected unit.
- 6 Set aggression levels for each unit.
- 7 These are the spells available to the entire team.
- 8 Useful from an organisational point of view: you can group players into squads, or place markers on the pitch.
- 9 These tabs select camera angles or if you want to play faster, allow you to speed up the game.
- 10 The score and time remaining. Confused yet?

it. There's even a semi-turn-based mode if you want to take the tactics up a notch.

KIT WASH

Saying all this, *Chaos League* is unmistakably B-grade in nature, with low production values and an awful lot of rough edges. The graphics are workmanlike, the grimy, medieval aesthetic apparently precluding the use of modern rendering techniques. Animations are stilted, character models clunky and the ball physics practically non-existent, with the pigskin seeming to stick to the players' legs rather than sit cradled in their arms. And when a scrap breaks out, the players simply whack each other repeatedly until one of them falls over.

Similarly, the textures have a cheap, washed-out quality with no real detail close-up, which is perhaps forgivable seeing as the game is unplayable in all but a couple of the more zoomed-out views. The complex heads-up interface is also cluttered, with three areas dedicated to spells when there only needs to be one and text that's often illegible.

Luckily, the quality of the gameplay shines through

regardless, and *Chaos League* is both engaging and pleasantly out of the ordinary. In fact, presentation aside, the only real gripe I have is the lack of any transfer options in the Championship mode, which makes a losing streak almost impossible to break. Oh, that and the fact that you can't attack and maim the referees, which would perhaps be taking things a bit too far, but in the light of recent events would doubtless provide a great deal of satisfaction. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Unique sports setting
- ✓ Highly tactical gameplay, with engaging management and league system
- ✓ Entertaining commentary
- ✗ Basic graphics
- ✗ Cluttered on-screen interface
- ✗ Championship game lacks a transfer market

78

Violent, ugly and a lot of fun – a sure-fire cult hit



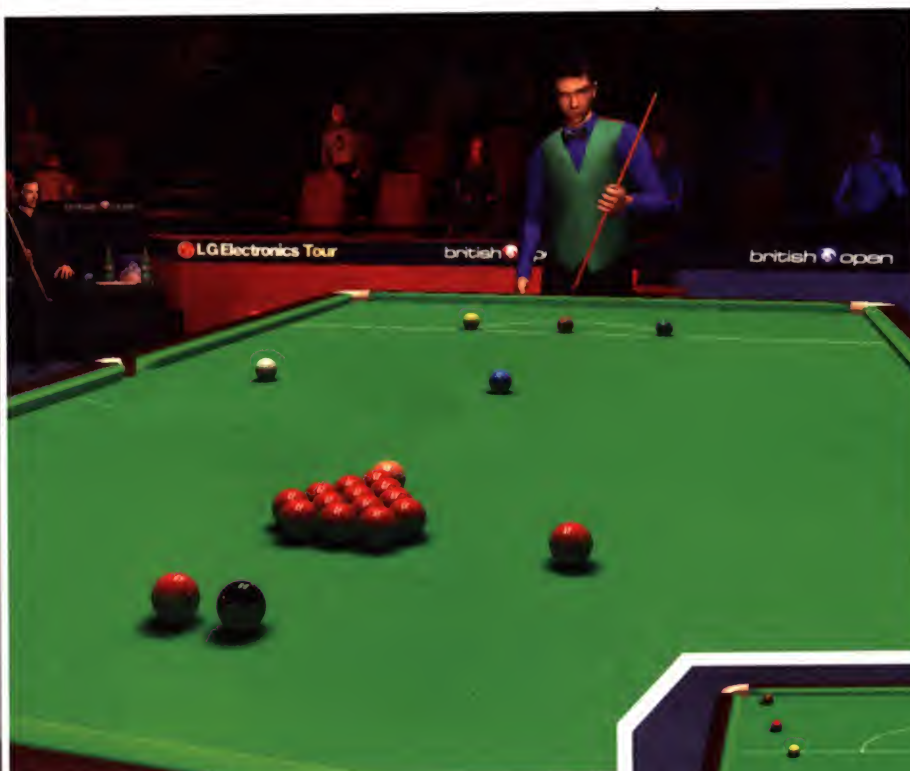
Experience points can be used to attain spells and abilities.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Blade Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.codemasters.co.uk/snooker2004

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill chalks his cue for this annual green baize update



Hill has never looked smarter.

RAPIDLY becoming something of a fixture on the PC sporting calendar, Codemasters' snooker-based affair has again missed the tournament from which it draws its name. Not our problem, though more sinister is the fact that the same developer has also completed *World Championship Pool 2004*, which has now mysteriously been put back until August. Furthermore, that game also features snooker, and this one also features pool. Go figure.

Marketing shenanigans aside, updating a snooker game must be a largely thankless task.

INPERSPECTIVE

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004

Reviewed Issue 143, Score 59%
From the same developer, but with the emphasis on the smaller table.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2003

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 78%
Last year's model should suffice for those of you with short arms and deep pockets.

At least with football, there is scope to include new transfers, stadia and – for spotters – the latest kits. But snooker is a sport in which the same players can eke out a career for a quarter of a century (witness Steve Davis' inclusion here) and the addition of a new waistcoat design or different coloured carpet at the Crucible may not necessarily warrant shelling out 30 quid.

But if you've yet to sample Codemasters'/Blade's take on the sport, it's a mildly compelling experience. Utilising a power bar as opposed to the more physical mouse control, no real tactile skill is required, and it's simply a question of knowing the basics of positional snooker play and being able to apply the requisite spin, side and power to achieve them. As for potting, it largely involves being able to judge if a

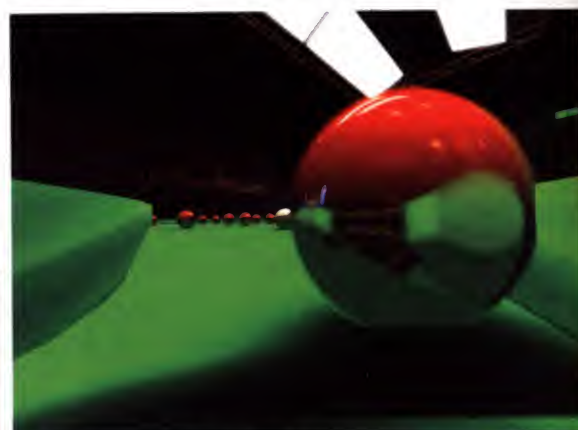


Nice gloves, shame about the 'tache.

truncated arrow is pointing towards the centre of the pocket.

Once you've mastered your cue, there's a wealth of opportunities to use it, with the game offering an extensive career mode including all the major professional tournaments. Shorter matches are available, although contesting the World Championship over a single frame does tend to cheapen the occasion. Either way, once

"The addition of a new waistcoat design may not warrant shelling out 30 quid"



You can see your face in those balls.



For the Americans who don't understand snooker.

somewhat undermined by the generic audience in Ben Sherman shirts. Elsewhere, pool is ably covered with the inclusion of both 8-ball and 9-ball modes, and John Virgo fans will be glad to know that he's back with some more trick shots.

Essentially, *World Championship Snooker 2004* is a technically competent recreation of the sport – replete with glib commentary and authentic coughing – but is only really of interest to enthusiasts of the green baize. But if you can get the hang of it, there is enough here to keep you busy for more time than any man can possibly spare. Perfectly playable, but ultimately destined for the 'broken leg' cupboard. **PCZ**

you've earned a few quid, you can change your image by buying yourself a new bow tie, or more usefully a new cue.

CLASSIC CUTS

Further longevity should be added by the new online mode, about which we can currently tell you nothing, servers being non-existent at time of writing. Also new are so-called Classic Matches, the bulk of which are drawn from recent years. The only exceptions are Steve Davis v Dennis Taylor in 1985 and the final between Fred and Joe Davis from 1940, although the integrity of that match is

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Plays like snooker
- ✓ Online play
- ✓ Extensive career mode
- ✗ No Jimmy White
- ✗ A bit fiddly

70

A solid contender



Why are your high-tech, highly funded enemies armed with broomsticks? We may never know.



ALIAS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Acclaim | Dev: Acclaim Studios Cheltenham
ETA: Out Now | www.aliasgame.com

REQUIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Anthony Holden slips into something figure-hugging as TV's sexiest super-spy comes to PC

YOU KNOW a genre has come of age when this happens. When a B-grade TV series about a sexy undercover spy-girl gets a B-grade videogame tie-in and it's labelled 'relentless stealth action' – that's when you know. In days gone by it might have been a side-scrolling shooter or a *Tomb Raider* clone, but in 2004, *Alias* The Game is all about stealth.

To be fair, it is a fairly good fit for the TV series, in which hot CIA op Sydney Bristow regularly frustrates the machinations of sinister billionaires and rogue

Russian agents with her talent for infiltration and disguise. And to be fairer still, the game has impressively high production values, with great voice work by the original cast, a quality storyline and some attractive motion-capture. There's even a minor attempt at innovation with a window-in-window mode that shows security feeds and enemy movements – as if to simulate the extra info being beamed to you from spy HQ.

Sadly however, that's as good as things get. The gameplay is pedestrian at best, fraught as it is with bland level design, a crap control system and a rigidly linear structure. Worse still, you're forced to revisit locations far more times than they deserve – a blatant attempt to skimp on development time.

True to the telly, the undercover 'alias' aspect of the game is largely just an excuse to

dress the lovely Ms Garner up in a different slutty outfit at the beginning of each mission. After a bit of token undercover work and some rudimentary stealthing, things inevitably degenerate into a scrappy martial arts catfight, as our lissome heroine kicks six shades of shit out of a variety of enemy stooges.

WHAT STEALTH?

The truth is, the 'stealth-action' tag given to this game is itself an alias – a shrewd attempt to hop the *Splinter Cell* bandwagon and ride it to market credibility. The stealth system is extremely shallow – you can hug walls, shoot cameras and perform silent kills, but ultimately you're relying on the frailty of the AI to make any of this possible. And while your inventory of spy gadgets may look good on paper, most of them can only be used in a specific context,



Monkey Magic weapons now? What next?



Split-screen action: a good idea, but useless.



She's a sneaky little minx, isn't she?

reducing their interest value to mere button-pushing.

Under the joke-store wig, the game's true identity is revealed: it's a simple roaming beat 'em up with a few guns and the occasional facile puzzle – a third-person action game of the most mundane kind. If any proof were needed, you only have to look at

the melee combat system.

You've got a full complement of open-hand attacks, weapon combos and finishing moves, and while it's not complex enough to transcend button-mashing, it's far more robust than the stealth dynamic.

Even so, *Alias* is remarkably boring, and even diehard fans of the series are probably better off without it. **CW**

INPERSPECTIVE

SPLINTER CELL:

PANDORA TOMORROW

Reviewed Issue 141, Score: 89%
Thief III is great, but *Splinter Cell* remains the premier choice for stealthy PC gamers, and this semi-sequel offers both single and multiplayer action.

SOUL REAVER 2

Reviewed Issue 111, Score: 86%
Games with decent melee-based combat on PC are few and far between. This one does an okay job of it, and you can get hold of it now for only a fiver – bargain!



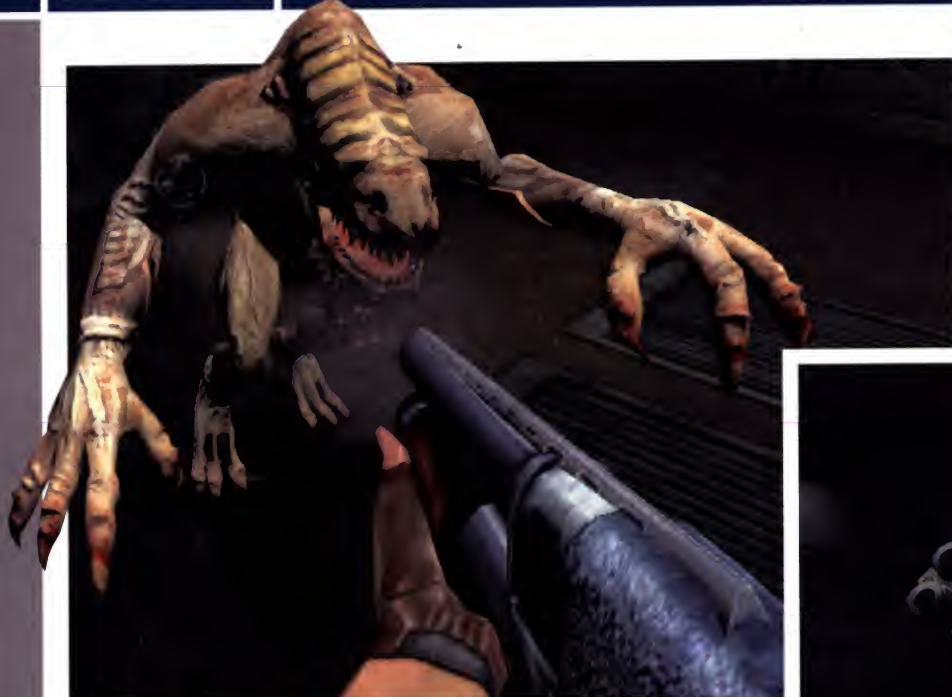
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent combat system
- ✓ Polished production values
- ✗ Risky stealth dynamics
- ✗ Poor level design
- ✗ Flawed control system

58

Codename: Boredom

"A simple roaming beat 'em up with a few guns and the occasional facile puzzle"



Look! It's just like *Far Cry*! Except shit.

KREED

■ £29.99 | Pub: Acclaim | Dev: Burut Creative Team
ETA: Out Now | www.kreed3d.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1GHz, 512 MB RAM and a 64 MB 3D card

Will Porter kills some things on a space station with some radiation and some monsters and some corridors and some big guns. Again

"WHAT? There's a reactor that needs shutting down? Through there? Where all the badly animated monsters are? And you're dying? And so will we all if I don't do something? Criminy! Well, I suppose I ought to wander through three identical corridors and flip a switch then... off I trot. Hope death isn't too much of a rum do!"

Yes, it's that time again – time for another crap FPS from the former Soviet Union to rear its badly textured, uninspired head. This one is less of a first-person shooter and more a test of patience in which you move from featureless room to featureless room, occasionally pressing the left mouse button when you see something with teeth coming towards you.

An empty shell of a shooter with a bottle of Costcutters own-brand vodka at its core, *Kreed* plays like a badly translated Russian tech demo from two years ago. It may look passable with a few pretty lights here and a few wisps of smoke there – but if you come here in search of gameplay (with 30 crisp notes and a song in your heart) then welcome to hell.

The story is something to do with spaceships being too close to some sort of anomaly (which is 'The Kreed' I think), which has turned everyone into monsters and/or madmen. I wasn't paying all that much attention – I was far too busy slamming my genitals in my top drawer in an effort to keep myself lucid. Indeed, if you

ever wanted to simulate wandering around a series of frustrating corridors, randomly unlocking other frustrating corridors that lead to other locked doors, then your prayers may have just been answered.

SAVING GRACES?

I suppose some of the weapons aren't bad – I quite liked the flame-thrower. And the way the mental spacemen chuck grenades is OK I guess. And, erm, the baddies sometimes hide behind crates, and when you shoot some of the monsters they occasionally run away. And... well... shooting stuff is fun... I suppose. Even if there is no indication of whether you're hitting anything or not. And when



Corridor furniture includes large metal tubes.



"Bloody hell, can you take this for a sec mate? My arm's about to drop off."



Grrrrrr. Aaarrggghhh. Snarl. Etc...

you start backtracking through the level and not realising that you've actually taken the wrong identical corridor, that's fun too. Hang on, no – that's shit. That's really shit.

It boils down to this: do not buy this game. Do not be suckered by the words 'first person shooter' cheerily

emblazoned on its cover. It isn't the greatest evil set loose upon this Earth, but with an RRP of £30, it slots neatly between McFly and Rustlers Microwaveable Flame-Grilled BBQ Ribsteaks in terms of my complete lack of interest. Avoid. [F]

INPERSPECTIVE

PAINKILLER

Reviewed Issue 142, Score 83%

A proper mindless shooter, not just one that became mindless through inherent rubbishness.

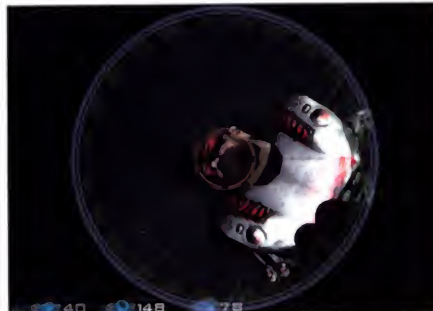
MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 76%

Kreed is reminiscent of the worst parts of *Mace Griffin*, but without any of its redeeming features.



The pizza boy had his comeuppance.



Stupid, Kreed-infected maniac finally at peace.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks all right
- ✓ We like firing guns at things
- ✗ Atrocious level design
- ✗ Bad translation, iffy storyline
- ✗ Very little fun to be had
- ✗ Requires patch to even run

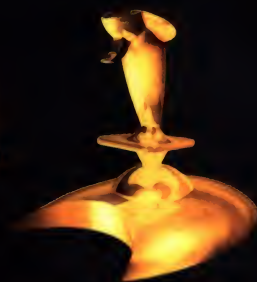
39

Rhymes with *Breed*



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TWO THRONES



■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Paradox Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Paul Presley is a man well versed in history. After all, he's lived through most of it...



Let's insult the French shall we?



Things kick off at Glastonbury...



Do I anger the peasants or the nobility? Hmm...

FROM THE people that brought you *Victoria* ('Guide the historic queen of England through 20 levels of non-stop platform action!') and *Hearts Of Iron* ('Experience love in a mechanised world of tomorrow') comes *Two Thrones*.

I'm lying of course. All the above titles are low-production historical strategy games in the same dusty vein as *Europa Universalis* (also from the same team –

what is it, like a boredom production line in there or something?). The latest example details European life in the exciting period between 1337 and 1490.

Which boils down to an animated version of those achingly dull board games that seem to consistently top the German charts. Pick a nation, expand through managing one of two (count them) resources to improve your eight

whole building types or by raising an army and beating the shit out of the French.

The lack of design nous displayed here makes it feel as though it was knocked out by two guys over a weekend. Combat is badly thought through, since a single attack on a fortified province (or square on the map) will take up over half the game's allotted time frame, and contains zero tactical requirements anyway.

In a genre where games like *Rise Of Nations* and *Total War* exist, there's just no excuse for this kind of under-designed rubbish. Seriously, even the Germans deserve better than *Two Thrones*.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

24

Makes anoraks look sexy

GOOKA: THE MYSTERY OF JANATRIS

■ Price: £19.99 | Publisher: Cenega

Developer: Centauri Production | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 733, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Sam Kieldsen discovers that sometimes you can judge a book by its cover...

LET'S BE honest, now: 'Gooka' isn't an appropriate name for a hero, is it? This moniker is hardly likely to command respect from underlings and strike fear into the hearts of marauding monsters. And what the hell is a Janatris come to that? At least the developer of this adventure game has some excuse for the silly handle: it's all based on an obscure Czech novel.

We didn't, er, have the chance to peruse the book, but if it's anything like the game then

it'll be fantasy of the most predictable variety. The plot sees you take charge of the foolishly named warrior-cum-upstanding pillar of the community, who has returned home after a long journey to find his gaff burnt down, his wife at death's door and his wee nipper missing.

The gameplay is standard adventure fare, complete with lots of fetching and carrying of various items, although instead of pointing and clicking you move around using the mouse and cursor keys.

It's rigidly linear stuff, with only a handful of tiny sub-quests distracting you from the main plot. Some basic RPG elements (turn-based combat and improving stats) have been tossed into the mix, but not enough to really suck you in.

Gooka scores points for its passable – if entirely unimaginative – graphics, and there's some comedy value to be had from the woeful script and voice acting. Overall though, it's strictly for fans of banal Eastern European fairytales.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

30

A big pile of gooka



The graphics aren't too bad if you squint a bit.



"Yes, that's my real name – what's so funny?"

SPELLFORCE: THE BREATH OF WINTER

■ £19.99 | Pub: JoWood/Koch Media | Dev: Phenomic | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

It's hot and sticky outside but *Richie Shoemaker* is feeling the chill



Combat can become a grind.



"Curse this lack of depth perception."

MERGING genres can be a shortcut to disaster, but in the case of *SpellForce* it proved a minty breath of fresh air, gently massaging RPG elements into a traditional fantasy RTS framework in much the way *Warcraft III* didn't. It's been enough of a hit – in Germany at least – to warrant a well-timed add-on, and we're happy to say *Breath Of Winter* is no cynical cash-in.

There's a lengthy new solo campaign, a skirmish option that was sorely missed from the first episode, online co-op play

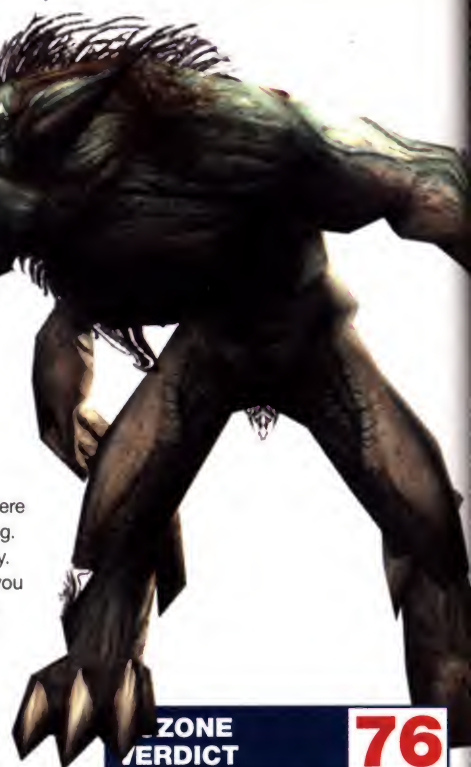
and the usual slew of new monsters and items. No siege weapons and mounted horse riders sadly, but some big fat dragons and monkey beasts, which go some way to making amends even if they are a touch generic.

With an average 40-hour play-through, *BoW*'s central campaign doesn't skimp on quantity – though, sure enough, the quality is stretched thin as a result. In much the same way as the original game, the campaign is tainted by cheap production values and

deadpan voice-overs, made worse here by repetition and a sore lack of editing.

The rest, however, works brilliantly. The skirmish-style 'free mode' is as you would expect, but here you can take your experience and items back into the main single-player campaign – even if you're playing co-op. The multiplayer code is tighter as well.

Overall, a good solid expansion – slightly rushed and with some issues still unresolved – but with plenty of magic left in it.



PC ZONE
VERDICT

76

A feature-packed add-on



BATTLE FOR TROY

■ £19.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Zono | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Ladies swoon as *Steve O'Hagan* does his best impression of Brad Pitt



Zoom right in on the action, for what it's worth.



Hordes of the Undead and Minotaurs play a part.



Money trickles in from each 'tower' that you control.

THIS IS apparently the first in a series of games designed to bring 'real-time strategy to the market at a price point typically overlooked by other publishers.' Why do they 'overlook' this budget price point? Possibly something to do with the fact that creating a good RTS takes a certain amount of time, money and effort.

All of which would seem to have gone amiss in the construction of *Battle For*

Troy. If it's half the price of other releases, it displays a third of the production values and a quarter of the imagination. Lamely rolled out on the back of the film, it's one of those strategy games where you have an overwhelming urge to stop playing after three or four near-identical missions. With its cutesy visuals and elementary gameplay, *Troy* is aimed at a younger, less critical audience. Consequently, the

interface is wholly unhelpful, and the tactical options are threadbare. Mostly, over the two puny eight-mission campaigns, you simply have to clear the map of enemies, picking up all the booty you can find along the way. Battlefield tactics are a classic case of 'select all and attack' with notions such as AI, pathfinding and unit formations as mythical as the saga the game depicts.

The visuals are vaguely passable, as is the sound, but there's simply no reason a seasoned gamer should bother with this, other than to shut up a Brad Pitt-idolising nephew for a few hours.

PC ZONE
VERDICT

27

Trojan horseshit



THE ADVENTURES OF

Sherlock Holmes

THE CASE OF

'The Silver Earring'



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PC
CD



REPLAY

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COMBAT MISSION ANTHOLOGY



That's one hell of a bayonet...

■ £19.99 | Pub: CDV/Koch Media | ETA: August 6

THE COMBAT *Mission* games have been arguably the biggest revolution in turn-based war-gaming in the last decade. Using the so-called 'we go' system whereby both sides take turns to issue orders, then sit back and watch the next minute of the battle unfold in real-time (much like *Laser Squad Nemesis*), it successfully melds the deliberative intensity of turn-based decision-making with the excitement of real-time gameplay.

This anthology unites all three of the *Combat Mission* games, meaning you get to fight battles in all the European and North African theatres of WWII – from the 1939 invasion of Poland right up to the fall

of Berlin in 1945. Almost every vehicle used in the conflict is in there, including loads of obscure tin cans from Hungary, Finland and a host of minor nations. And true to the rigorous ethos of developer Battlefront, every vehicle is modelled down to the angle of the frontal armour slope. It's a positive goldmine for enthusiasts, and when played head to head, is an absolute treat for tactics junkies.

On the other hand, the engine is starting to creak heavily in this day and age, and it's still far too hardcore to be considered mainstream. But if you want some serious realism in your strategy, this is a fantastic place to start.

Steve O'Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT

81

ROBIN HOOD: LEGEND OF SHERWOOD

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: July 24



Errol Flynn fans will lap it up.

FOLLOWING the astounding global success of *Commandos* in 1998, German developer Spellbound had a brief period of success making unsuitable clones of the World War II puzzler in different historical settings. First they gave us the Wild West larks of *Desperados*, then the sylvan charms of *Robin Hood: Legend Of Sherwood* – now available for a paltry fiver.

And while this is perhaps the least successful of the *Commandos* clones, it's also the one that departs most clearly from the original blueprint, with its bows

and arrows, mouse-driven swordplay and permanent base camp. It's just as tough and frustrating as any of its ilk, and still offers plenty of playability; the only problem being that it's far from the best in its class. The vastly superior *Commandos 2* is now available for the same price, as is the moderately superior *Desperados*, making this a dubious choice no matter the cost. Still, it's a decent game and should not be dismissed outright.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT

59

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: July 24



AH THE irony. Some 18 months ago, we reviewed this game in our Replay section for the same price as it is now. At that time, we spouted all sorts of guff about how time hadn't tarnished the polished metal skin of this grand RTS, and how it was still fresh and distinctive despite the years; all the while wailing to the heavens about the injustice of the game's miserable sales. And after all that, it never came out.

Due to some unknown scandal, the budget release of the game was ditched

at the 11th hour, and it's taken another 18 months to reappear. It's now three years since the original *Steel Soldiers* came out, and as we all know, that's an eternity in this business. The game still plays well, its all-action dynamics making for a taut and pacy ride. But with offerings like *Ground Control II* and *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II* on the market, it's looking decidedly out of date, and you really needn't bother.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT

60



Believe it or not, this actually looked good three years ago.



'Never trust a Tueadassian': old Klingon proverb.

MASTER OF ORION 3

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: Out Now

4-X SPACE strategy – eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate. Depending on your state of mind, that expression will either send a thrill of excitement through your loins or will have you scrabbling for the 'abort' button as your mind reels from the sheer magnitude of tedium implied. It's strictly for the hardcore, but if you count yourself among that number, the *Master Of Orion* series has always been a firm favourite.

For the uninitiated, *MOO3* is an incredibly complex empire-building game – a bit like *Civ* in space – that sacrifices graphics in favour of a huge research

tree and baffling array of options. This episode introduces a couple of key features – real-time combat and streamlined micromanagement. The idea is, instead of doing everything yourself, you can absolve most of your responsibility to a set of viceroys, which is fine in theory but doesn't really work in practice.

Even if you do love the genre, *MOO3* is something of a failed experiment – and for ten quid there are better options.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT 46

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: Out Now

THE DEVELOPERS of this game know their RPG-craft. Boasting key creative staff from the likes of *Fallout*, *Arcanum* and *Vampire: Bloodlines*, *ToEE* comes with an impressive legacy. However, this is very much a minor effort from developer Troika, that was probably knocked out in a weekend to help fund bigger projects (probably).

Saying that, it's got plenty to recommend it. Based on a classic Greyhawk D&D module, this is hardcore dungeon-crawling at its purest, playing very much like a computerised version of

its pen and paper inspiration. An excellent turn-based combat system gives the game much of its substance, while a capable isometric engine does a sterling job on the graphics. What's more, many of the original bugs and flaws have since been fixed by a duo of patches.

As with many of the 'Atari Best Of' range, this game would be more palatable for a fiver, but even so it's a fine purchase for the D&D hardcore.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT 78



Combat, combat and more combat.



And yes, you guessed it, giant spiders!

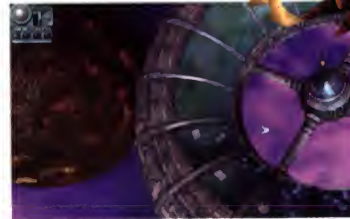
RE-REF

STARTOPIA

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: July 24



Nope, mine's definitely bigger.



One day, all this could be yours.

BRIMMING with ideas and boasting weeks of challenging gameplay, this space station-based god game was sadly overlooked on its initial release. It's been available for a tenner for a while now, but for a mere £5, you've really got no excuse to ignore it any longer.

The main aim of *Startopia* is to turn a doughnut-shaped orbital into a thriving space station. Divided into multiple segments – one per mission – you must fill each one with just the right balance of entertainment, leisure and hotel facilities, with your eventual goal being to own the entire station.

Along the way you'll encounter plenty of obstacles, including social divides, outbreaks of violence and plagues of alien vermin intent on destroying all of your hard work. Granted, it's getting on a bit graphically, but once you've discovered just how many options and amusing scenarios are available you'll wonder why you ever overlooked it.

If you're looking for a top quality, cheap god game, you'd be hard pressed to find better.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT 76

LEFTOVERS

▲ PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

And so finally we come to my favourite part of the magazine. Not so much a set of reviews as a protracted public service announcement, this is where the dregs of the bargain bins go to die.

And where better to start than *Might & Magic 8* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out July 24)? Belonging to that special breed of games that earned a single-figure rating in *PC ZONE*, this is an RPG of the most heinous and offensive kind. Even four years ago it was hopelessly outdated and unplayable; now, it's an insult to the very plastic it's printed on: 0 per cent.

Also to be avoided is *Next Generation Tennis 2002* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out July 24). Woeful two years ago, it's truly abominable now, though salvages some humour points for its remarkably inaccurate likeness of Tim Henman. But since they couldn't even manage to get it on shelves during Wimbledon, it nets just 13 per cent.

Continuing the sporting theme, we've got a bit of a wildcard in the form of *Matt Hayes' Fishing* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out July 24). Fishing games are a slippery breed, and though usually just for old men on business trips, can actually be quite soothing when you've got a stinking hangover. This one was once part of the EA stable, and as such is reasonably polished and competent, and hooks a respectable 51 per cent.

Back to more familiar PC territory, we have *Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds* (Atari, £9.99, Out Now). Taking the popular turn-based card game and turning it into a strange real-time spell-duelling affair, this game was a bad, mistaken idea from conception, and is really better forgotten. 25 per cent.

So, till next month, consider yourselves warned.

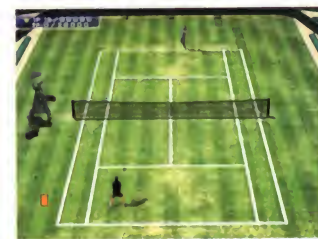
Anthony Holden



Magic: The Gathering – Battlegrounds.



Might & Magic 8.



Next Generation Tennis 2002.

FEEDBACK

Will Porter grinds the handle that makes the *ZONE* review monkey leap and twirl, while sneering readers throw their thoughts into his hat

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words**. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

MANHUNT

REVIEWED ISSUE 143 (BY JAMIE SEFTON), SCORE: 74%

What we thought

"Despite the pernickety camera, repetitive gameplay and often frustrating combat, it does provide a unique atmosphere, tense moments and visceral video-taped kill cut-scenes"

What you said

This game is great – it's atmospheric, scary and funny. It's incredibly tense when you're hiding and you hear a redneck saying how he's going to kill you, and it's also hilarious to hear the mutterings or screams of the Smileys. The gore is great, what with all the incredibly gruesome and close-up shots of the action. The graphics too, while not great, are also fairly good. But the greatest part is the sound, which takes up over 1GB alone. God bless all that crazy talk.

Spudy2000

Personally, I wasn't very excited about this game. I'm not the type

who gets off from carving people up on a computer screen. However, I do love games like *GTA* that manage to use violence effectively and make the game more fun. Unfortunately, *Manhunt* is just a pathetic, gimmicky attempt to sell copies through shocking, rather than decent, gameplay. What little gameplay there is revolves around hiding in shadows, then holding down your action button before you watch a cut-scene. And in my opinion, pressing down on a button to watch an over-hyped cut-scene is not a worthy selling point.

Bl1tz

Jamie's comment

Manhunt is not in the same league as Rockstar's *GTA* games – it's an acquired taste, which is why I couldn't give it more than 74 per cent. However, as a stealth game it has great atmosphere, fantastic voice-acting and an extremely sick sense of humour. *Bl1tz* is being rather harsh I feel – you need to play the game further than the first few levels to realise there's much more to the gameplay than just hiding and triggering kill cut-scenes. Go deeper, and you find the later levels are pacier with some rather nifty (and violent) action shootouts.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

REVIEWED ISSUE 143 (BY ANTHONY HOLDEN), SCORE: 72%

What we thought

"*Hitman: Contracts* is no *Splinter Cell*. There's fun

to be had here, but it's tempered by frustration and repetition."

What you said

The first game was good (well, OK), and had some great ideas. The second lost my interest half way through. This incarnation, however, is so cool it's got an icicle hanging from its nose.

The AI and graphics are where this game really shines. There are great features, like when you take a victim's clothes and their body is then found. Following this, guards start looking for somebody dressed that way, or automatically start looking suspiciously at you – leading to some paranoia when walking past a NPC giving you a hard stare. After playing *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid 2*, I found *Hitman: Contracts* to be different enough to keep me interested – especially when aiming for the tricky 'Silent Assassin' ranking.

HRGiger

Just thought I'd chime in to say I was completely underwhelmed by *Hitman: Contracts*. I really don't mind the series as a whole, but someone should tell the developer that when it's adding new features to a sequel,

a variety of dead prostitutes and strippers aren't really vital gameplay features.

Samwise



Manhunt: old-fashioned fun for all the family.

Ant's comment:

Aww, come on Mr Giger – *Hitman: Contract's* AI couldn't be more mediocre if it tried. The clothes-stealing may provide occasional fun, but it really can't compare to the tricks of Sam Fisher or Garrett from *Thief*. The *Hitman* franchise has never lived up to its true potential, and sadly, this uninspired episode suggests it never will.

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA

REVIEWED ISSUE 144 (BY ANTHONY HOLDEN), SCORE: 69%

What we thought

"*True Crime* is not a terrible game. However, it's so similar in design to *GTA3* and *Vice City*, and so soulless in comparison, that it's really very hard to recommend."

What you said

I'm quite disappointed with *True Crime*. Desperate for some *GTA*-style action to tide me over until *San Andreas* is unleashed, I brushed the criticisms aside and gave it a go.

Ferret

"Pressing down on a button to watch an over-hyped cut-scene is not a worthy selling point"

Bl1tz AIN'T NO FAN OF MANHUNT

What starts out promising soon becomes repetitive: I loved the random crime parts and being able to frisk and arrest, but this quickly loses its appeal. The branching single-player story was almost good, had it not been for the awfully unlikable Nick Kang. Who thought we would find this twat cool? One thing it does do better than *GTA*, however, is the fighting. While not great, it's an improvement on the one-dimensional *GTA* system.

Stu 'Whole Damn Show' Stapleton

True Crime is rubbish, and the new PC exclusive features aren't exactly awe-inspiring – the whole thing just smells of *GTA* rip-off. The way you drive around to missions that've been radioed to you – that I like. The fighting – that's OK too. But why go with voice-acting and plot that would make a rubbish '80s buddy-movie hang its head in shame? It was like *K-9* without the dog.

Ant's comment

Stu, you're a man after my own heart – Nick Kang is indeed a monumental twat, and this is a perfect example of just how badly judged the whole game is compared to the near-perfection of *Vice City*.

And Ferret, you too are spot on – the new PC 'features' are laughable, though if anything you've been a bit generous to the button-mashing combat. I like the Jim Belushi reference too – definite shades of *K-9* in there. (Though I bet now we've said that the sequel will have a dog in it...) [E]



True Crime: a bit rubbish really.

FEEL REAL



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YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

DOWN,
NOT
OUT



■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ We're awash with mournful tunes, anguished wailing, cries of disbelief and dejection. *Warhammer Online* is gone and how many more must follow? How often must we hear press statements about budgetary shortfalls and investment analysis?

It begs a more serious question however, namely why do the games that show the most promise, the most thought and originality suffer such miserable fates, while the template followers, the bandwagon jumpers and the *EQ* clones prosper?

The easy answer is to blame the money men, to point accusatory fingers at the suits and decry a lack of ambition. But is it that simple? No, of course not. The bottom line, my dear brothers and sisters, stops with you. With me. With us all.

The investors simply want to make money and they'll go wherever that lies. If we buy the insipid, it's 'Insipid 2.0' that gets made. And we do, we buy the insipid in droves. So where were we when *URU Live* was being pre-registered and looking for support? Where were we when *Mythica* was trying to make its way in the world? The calls went out, we did not answer and as such, we now deserve everything we get.

Before you start biting down on your cyanide capsules however, it's not all doom and gloom. This month we've got no fewer than three 'live' MMOG titles for you to sample on our cover discs. First up is a stonking 30-day free trial in *Anarchy Online*, complete with both *Notum Wars* and *Shadowlands* expansion packs. If you fancy a more contemporary conflict, we've also got a free trial for the recently updated *World War II Online* (see review page 96). Finally, the fantasy contingent can sample the delights of *Runescape*. Something for everyone then.

▼ Except *Warhammer* fans. Sigh...

WARHAMMER ONLINE CANNED

PROMISING UK FANTASY MMOG FEELS THE FINANCIAL PINCH



WO had a distinctive, gritty style.

THE CURSE of ZONE. A terrifying thing. Legend has it that our first editor once refused to buy some pegs from a travelling gypsy woman and we've been paying the price ever since.

The latest victim is the promising-looking *Warhammer Online*. Our last issue hit the shelves with glowing previews, interviews with the brilliant folk behind the game and proclamations of it being the saviour of British massively multiplayer gaming. However, in the blink of an eye everything went tits up, the project is canned, the company folds and our hearts sink. Curse our bad luck.

The game had been a joint venture between Climax and *Warhammer* licence holders, Games Workshop, with Sega providing distribution and publishing capabilities, although no actual funding.

The official reason given for the project's



A dark spectre loomed over the project from early on.

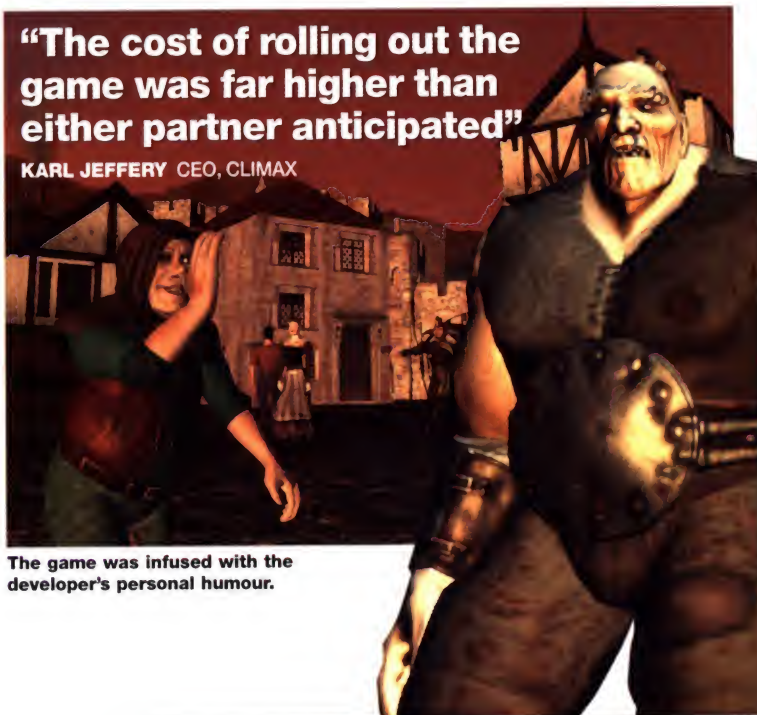
cancellation was one of financial" snowballing. Climax CEO Karl Jeffery stated: "MMOs have a very different business model from traditional (boxed) games and require a huge up-front investment in servers, bandwidth and customer support teams. The actual cost of rolling out the game was far higher than either partner had anticipated and we've decided that we simply cannot justify it."

The cancellation caused waves of uncertainty to ripple through the industry,

with many questioning the financial worth of MMOG development at all. Fellow Britsoft developer, Codemasters, currently working on fantasy MMOG *Dragon Empires*, was keen to assure the public that its own title was firmly on track. "This is a tricky business," stated Peter Tyson of the team, "MMOs are very difficult to do technologically - you're developing twice as much stuff as you do for a normal game. It takes time, it takes money, but we're committed to getting through it and we're all learning a lot in the process." So all sounds good there, unless the ZONE curse hits them too. Let's keep our fingers crossed for a happy outcome.

"The cost of rolling out the game was far higher than either partner anticipated"

KARL JEFFERY CEO, CLIMAX



The game was infused with the developer's personal humour.

STOP PRESS!

More bad news. As we go to press, news reaches us of another high-profile MMOG cancellation. *Ultima X Odyssey*, the follow-up to *Ultima Online*, has also bitten the dust.

David Yee, producer on the title issued a statement expressing his sadness. "This isn't an easy decision but it's the right move for the future of all things *Ultima*, including the community and the team," he said.

The closure won't result in any layoffs at the team, with staff being moved over to work on the existing *Ultima Online* brand, including an upcoming expansion pack for the existing title and an as yet unannounced *UO* project.



88
JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED
SW *Galaxies* joins the space race



92
READERS' CHALLENGE
It's back - better than ever!



94
JOINT OPS
NovaLogic's online shooter



101
NEVERQUEST
Steve Hill's holding out for a hero

Happy Birthday Anarchy Online

PETS, PARTIES AND PARADES AS THE SCI-FI MMOG TURNS THREE



The leet promotion offers a gaggle of the cute critters for you to train.

WHILE THE inhabitants of *Anarchy Online* continue to cast nervous eyes skyward in advance of the imminent *Alien Invasion* expansion pack, developer Funcom is hoping to calm a few nerves with what it describes as the "silliest pre-order program ever conceived".

Gamers who reserve their copies of *Alien Invasion* prior to the September 1 release will be given ten pet 'leets' - the in-game version of killer rabbits - to train and enhance however they see fit. In true *Pokémon* style, you can challenge other leet owners to duels.

Meanwhile, *Anarchy Online* itself has just turned three years old. June 27 saw the sci-fi MMOG reach its third year of operation, having notched up some impressive statistics along the way. Not only is it currently the largest online gaming world at over 480,000,000 square metres, it's seen over three million characters created, had over two million game clients distributed and still holds the record for the most number of simultaneous users online at over 11,000.

The event was marked with a massive in-game celebration, official and unofficial

parties taking place across Rubi-ka, a parade of characters, competitions and a birthday gift of a free 30-day gamecode.

The leet campaign should be up and running as you read this, so get the game installed with our exclusive free trial offer on this month's DVD, sign yourself up and put in the *Alien Invasion* pre-order now for your cute-as-hell leet gift set.

- Publisher: Funcom
- Developer: Funcom
- ETA: Out now
- Website: www.anarchyonline.com

WIN ANARCHY ONLINE GOODIES

Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card and nano-infused merchandise up for grabs



In honour of *Anarchy Online*'s third birthday, we've joined forces with the good folk at Funcom to offer you a grab-bag of AO merchandise. Five lucky winners will get their hands on exclusive posters and T-shirts, copies of the *Prophet Without Honour* novel that sets the

back-story for the AO universe, the limited edition AO Vol.2 soundtrack CD and, best of all, an in-game luxury apartment, perfect for throwing swanky post-hunting dinner parties for your clanmates.

To top it all off though, one lucky grand prize-winner gets all of the above plus a top-of-the-range ATI Radeon 9800

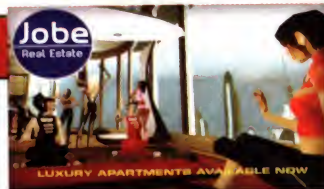
Pro 256MB graphics card! Ideal for exploring the majesty of Rubi-ka in its full visual glory.

To be a lucky winner, all you need to do is answer the following question:

Which notorious punk band had a hit single with *Anarchy In The UK*?

- A The Sex Pistols**
- B Sir Cliff Richard**
- C The London Philharmonic Orchestra**

Send your answer before Thursday August 19 on the back of a postcard or envelope to: *Anarchy Online* Competition, PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



HOLLYWOOD STOCK EXCHANGE

(WWW.HSX.COM)

Fame. Was it ever more quantifiable? From the low-brow desperation of the Big Brother morons to the giddy heights of the Hollywood A-list such as Julia Roberts and Jack Nicholson, no matter where you turn you'll find magazines, newspapers, websites, TV channels and gossip-mongers analysing every celebrity breadcrumb they can lay their hands on. This insatiable need for idols that our society has reduced itself to is a testament to how intellectually bankrupt we've become, how meaningless now is our own sense of self-worth. The day you honestly find yourself caring about what a boyband non-entity thinks about anything at all is the day you can pack your bags and wave the human race goodbye, as you no longer have the right to be in the same species that split the atom, landed on the moon and developed fire. You are officially worthless.

Until that day though, you might as well have some fun at celebrity's expense. *The Hollywood Stock Exchange* is basically 'IMDB - The Game'. Along similar lines to Auntie Beeb's *Celebdaq* stocks and shares game, *HSX* dispenses with the global fame database and concerns itself solely with the world of film.

Buy and sell shares in actors, movie-makers and the films themselves. Build a portfolio and watch the stock move based on the movies' changing value. Simple.

As virtual trading games go, *HSX* is pretty extensive, with the option to invest in spread betting, trust funds and bonds, plus plenty of other financial terms that I neither understand nor have the desire to learn about. Which probably explains why I can't turn a profit to save my life. Curse you, Ben Stiller!



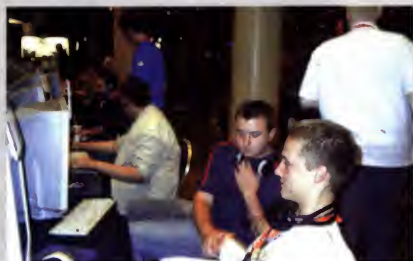
The bottom's falling out of J-Lo stocks. Ho ho.

CLAN
DIARY

INFINITY E-SPORTS

INFINITY E-SPORTS

PHILIP WRIDE, Manager



CPL guidelines made life hard to continue.

These are troubled times at Infinity-eSports. Approaching our first anniversary, bad news hit the camp: Sapphire Tech announced it wasn't able to continue supporting the team due to internal restructuring and being unable to free up resources. Being so close to the CPL (Cyberathlete Professional League) deadline, this really affected the team – and the pending roster lock on the CPL summer event meant even more problems. On top of all that came the decision from the Swedish contingent to depart our *Counter-Strike* team and thus close the C-S squad completely as the remaining members didn't have the energy to rebuild.

“With so many setbacks it was hard to rebuild and our fate was sealed. For now, Infinity-eSports has closed down...”

This fallout had a knock-on effect on the rest of our squads. First, the successful *Warcraft 3* team decided they had a better offer from a German angle, so all the players and staff moved across to this new team. This came as a shock and was totally unexpected, but this is the sort of thing that continually happens in gaming, much like in many other professional sports. The lure of a greater level of support and the troubles that have plagued Infinity-eSports recently didn't help the situation either.

Following on from this, the planned bootcamp for the *Call Of Duty* team didn't happen due to transport issues – and with the recent breakdown of the *Counter-Strike* squad, arguments ensued. Unfortunately, the upshot was that the *COD* division made the decision to call it a day too.

All in all, it's been a bumpy ten months with many comings and goings, as well as a level of success that any team would be proud of. With a number of unfortunate setbacks, it was hard to continually rebuild and strengthen – and in the end our fate was inevitable. Infinity-eSports is closed for the foreseeable future. Time will tell whether the name is resurrected for a third time and whether I'll be a part of the legacy.

I'd like to thank all the players over the past ten months in all the squads for the time they dedicated to the team – I'm disappointed it ended like this. Such is the life of a professional gamer...

FEEL THE STEEL

TIME TO GET PARANOID IN SPACE WITH MMOG STEEL LAW ONLINE



The future – isometric and red.

ACCORDING to the Oxford-based developer of *Steel Law Online*, Red Redemption, the future is going to be a place filled with conspiracies, aliens, violence and danger, all accessible through Java-equipped Internet browsers.

The game puts you onboard a giant city-ship, floating through the depths of space in the far future. Character choices include cops, spies, assassins, businessmen, criminals, cultists or just wanderers, all looking to climb the ladder of power at the expense of your fellow citizens.

In an interesting twist, should you tire of the day-to-day complexities of keeping a good scheme running, you can opt instead to log in as a brainless monster in order to dish out some wanton damage to your fellow shipmates.



Milton Keynes in space – not sure about the parking though.

Steel Law was originally a tabletop role-playing game for adults only, and the online game retains those themes by restricting itself to an over-18 audience only.

The game recently underwent an extended open beta test, with potential conspiracy nuts able to try out the various gaming functions in limited form. May saw the team open up the whole game to the public and

as you read this, you should be able to sign up yourself – as long as you're over 18. We'll have a full review shortly, just as soon as we prise ZONE's own conspiracy theorist out from his tinfoil-plated security bunker.

■ Publisher: Red Redemption
■ Developer: Red Redemption
■ ETA: Out Now
■ Website: www.steel-law.com

EVERQUEST TRIES
PEOPLE POWER

EQ LIVE FANS TELL IT LIKE IT IS AT THE FIRST GUILD SUMMIT



Fans came from across the States to be heard.



The EQ development team taking suggestions.

SONY ONLINE Entertainment has always had a good reputation for listening to the needs and feedback of its legion of subscribers, but June saw this taken to new levels at the first *EverQuest Live* Guild Summit.

Almost 70 EQ die-hards from across the United States were

gathered in one location, most from the more prominent in-game guilds.

They were then introduced to the game's design team, and what followed was a frank discussion on how to take *EQ Live* forward and where the game needs improving.

According to Sony, the event proved to be a huge success with

hundreds of ideas, big and small, emerging from the session. As a result, summits are now planned to be held on a regular basis.

Many of the suggestions are already being implemented, with many more planned in the months to come – all designed to prolong the life of *EverQuest Live* for the foreseeable future. A full list of what's planned can be found at www.everquest.com.



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Keith Parkinson – Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes

"WE DON'T HAVE any of that nauseatingly cute drivel in *Vanguard*!" Keith Parkinson, art director on *Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes* is talking about jolly little elves with happy faces and cherubic voices, none of which you'll find in his game. Parkinson is musing on where he'd least like to spend the night on Telon, the planet on which the 'high fantasy' MMORPG action of *Vanguard* takes place.

In the absence of a cute elven village, he plumps for an as yet unnamed scorched land: "One that still belches flames and corruption into the air. The nightlife is dead. The day-life is dead. It's all dead, all of the time – not good." Sounds like Milton Keynes.

When talking about the slightly more salubrious places on Telon, Parkinson conjures

up a fantastical world that keeps its roots in reality and offers a visual style with many influences. These include a mix of his love for Dungeons & Dragons fantasy, along with the real-world places and cultures he's visited on his travels. "There's one thing that's always present and that's nature," Parkinson says. "I've always placed a lot of importance on natural environments and have been enjoying setting the tone for Telon. Building a world that feels real is important to me."

Many of the developers behind *Vanguard* worked on the original *EverQuest* – including the much touted Brad McQuaid – so they've learnt a great deal from what Parkinson describes as "the first go around". While they're keen to promote *Vanguard* as a third-

generation MMOG, Parkinson emphasises the fact that the world won't be too alien to its players.

"There's a certain level of comfort that I want our players to feel when they enter our world," he says. "You get comfort from the familiar. That's not to say it can't be approached in a unique way, though. Once our players have that level of comfort, I want to scare them, thrill them, challenge them and basically make them crave to find out what's over that next hilltop."

He concludes: "I don't think there's going to be any other game that'll be able to bring the breadth of vision and engender the spirit of exploration that we will. I'm having so much fun with this game it should be illegal!" ☞

"Once our players have that level of comfort, I want to scare them, thrill them and challenge them"

KEITH PARKINSON, VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES

■ Publisher: Microsoft
 ■ Developer: Sigil Games Online
 ■ ETA: TBC
 ■ Website: www.vanguardsoh.com



Space ace...

STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED

Yahoo! Rebel pilot *Jamie Sefton* climbs aboard his X-Wing for an exclusive hands-on of LucasArts' outer space expansion

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Sony Online Entertainment

PUBLISHER

Activision

WEBSITE

www.starwarsgalaxies.com

ETA

October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Real-time space combat expansion
- Fly more than 15 ships including X-Wings and TIE fighters
- 80-plus players can join in battles at any one time
- Includes four new professions and two new species

CV**SOE**
SONY ONLINE
ENTERTAINMENT

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Most famed for the *EverQuest* series, the San Diego team has also spent the last year and a bit working with the bods over at LucasArts to bring the *Star Wars* world to your broadband connections.

2003 *Star Wars Galaxies* is launched, actually ahead of schedule, and there is much rejoicing. Until the lack of space-based action hits home.

2004 Plenty of content updates later, and after much refining and tweaking, the most popular sci-fi MMOG on the market is going great guns. The first fan convention is held, in-game housing is unveiled and the first in-game Jedi make an appearance.



The beta test will determine the zone limit for ships - now around 80. Target enemies and weapons to disable engines.

Don't get too near an exploding ship or you'll take damage.

HAVING A *Star Wars* MMOG without the ability to engage in space combat was always going to feel as half-finished as the Death Star from *Return Of The Jedi*. How can you totally immerse yourself in George Lucas's universe when you're living in the Cantina and just looking at the stars?

Well, this autumn, *Jump To Lightspeed* is set to become the first official expansion for *Star Wars Galaxies*, featuring real-time online space combat in more than 15 ships for a minimum of

80 players. Excited yet? You should be, because we've just had the world's first play – and we've only just come back down to Earth...

BOYS AND GIRLS

As well as giving you the opportunity to collect and fly any number of ships such as the X-Wing, Y-Wing, TIE Fighter and your starter vessel, the Z-95 Headhunter, *Jump To Lightspeed* introduces two more yet-to-be-revealed playable species and four new professions – Rebel pilot, Imperial pilot, privateer and shipwright.

Pilots are basically flying soldiers of the dark or light side of the Force, whereas shipwrights are specialist traders who'll be able to fit any craft with 15 high-tech upgrades. Privateers meanwhile, are probably the most interesting new addition, and are basically an extension of the smuggler, but with the ability to transport hidden illegal contraband between planets, avoiding Imperial crackdowns, NPCs and different factions. "In the ten zones available, we've actually included additional 'wild space' zones that are just for privateers to go and explore and do their stuff," says associate producer Julio Torres.

Every profession in *Star Wars Galaxies* is set to benefit from the expansion pack and each will be able to access the various ships, but some roles will expand and become more involving.

For example, a droid engineer is set to become much more important now that your robotic companions can join you in your ships for faster repairs, and more powerful weapons and shields – just like Luke and R2-D2. Musicians and dancers will also get a kick out of being able to travel the galaxy in Cantinas built inside the bigger craft, like intergalactic cruise ship entertainers.

To start our exclusive play, Torres hands over the joystick controls and launches me straight into one of the zones above Naboo piloting a YT-1300

multi-transport ship, better known to the world as the Millennium Falcon. If you're familiar with any of Lawrence Holland's *X-Wing* games, you immediately feel comfortable playing *JTL* and I soon begin weaving in and out of enemy craft, bagging my first kill – a new Hutt fighter.

HAN'S ON

"You or your group of up to 20 fighters can shoot down AI-controlled ships for experience points and loot, such as engine parts for upgrades," explains Torres as I fly. "However, you can't 'kill' player ships in space. We thought it wouldn't be much fun if you spent ages getting an X-Wing then immediately lost it in battle. If you take damage and get too beaten up, you have to return to a planet's surface to make repairs. If your character is killed on the ground, you have to clone to the nearest facility as before; but when you're reborn, you regain your ships, without all the bonus stuff you may have bought or collected."

The scanner at the bottom of the screen is only a basic 2D work-in-progress affair, so I find that targeting ships on-screen by pressing a joystick button and using the HUD's blue arrows to indicate an enemy's position is much more effective. I polish off several more



Hutt fighters and a squadron of TIE fighters, and they disappear in an explosion of colour and collectible debris. I then take my Rebel pilot character for a tour of the Falcon, wandering merrily through the cargo bay, corridors and gun turrets, which you'll be able to man, while a fellow player (preferably a Wookiee) takes the controls of the ship.

SPEED BOOST

I finish off my play of *Jump To Lightspeed* with a test drive of the X-Wing, complete with opening and closing wings, and four blasters with custom firing modes. Immediately, the ship feels lighter and more manoeuvrable, although the game still doesn't feel as fast as other *Star Wars* space combat titles.

"Yes, we're working on the speed of the game at the moment," admits Torres. "The trick isn't necessarily making it faster, it's giving the perception that it's faster. For example, we've developed this space dust, so when you move, it has an effect on you and the area around you to give you a feeling of great speed."

Torres promises that as well as dogfighting above planets, there'll also be nebulae and sprawling asteroid fields to negotiate and hide in – especially useful if you're being chased by a Star Destroyer. You'll also be able to hyperspace in the game by visiting a terminal in a space station and choosing a location. "If you have a quality ship, you can hyperspace just like in the movies, with the effect of stars streaming past you, for instantaneous travel," Torres grins excitedly. "It's very cool."

Jump To Lightspeed will without doubt become a must-have expansion pack for *Star Wars Galaxies* addicts. With the sublime graphics, new professions and races, over 100 engaging missions and a great fleet of ships for incredibly exciting real-time space battles, *Jump To Lightspeed* is reaching for the stars and getting there in style. **PCZ**

RETURN OF THE JEDI



Jedi dentistry: a new skillset?

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF JEDI KNIGHTS AND BOUNTY HUNTERS

Over the next month or two, LucasArts will be releasing free upgrades that are set to completely revamp the Jedi and the Bounty Hunters. Two phases of upgrade are planned – first what it actually is to be a Jedi or Bounty Hunter, with the process of

training to follow soon afterwards. Training to be a Jedi will now be a quest-based system, where you have to prove yourself to either side – dark or light – before becoming force-sensitive. You grow from there – Padawan, to Knight, to Master.

"It's an interesting change," says *JTL*'s associate producer Julio Torres. "The original plan was to make it difficult to be a Jedi, just so we didn't get too many, because it was special. But as *Galaxies* evolved, we realised that a lot of people want to be Jedi and it's a lot of fun, so why not make the process simpler? It's not going to be easy, but it's going to be easier than it was. It's not cool to have a universe with only two Jedi – it's nice to have a few!"

"You'll be able to hyperspace just like in the movies, with the effect of stars streaming past you. It's very cool!"

JULIO TORRES
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, *JTL*

FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

Vietnam may have been a hellish experience for the thousands of young lives wasted during America's misguided attempts to police the world in the 1960s, but the latest gaming incarnation of Hollywood's favourite war – *Battlefield Vietnam* – is a rare treat indeed.

Last month's Fight Club took us to South East Asia and a ripping time was had by all. Despite initial confusion and the usual masses of uncontrolled firefights breaking out randomly on all corners of each map, things quickly settled. As the combatants became more organised, so the gaming fun increased. Lots of madcap helicopter action, planes crashing into hangers and even an exquisite sniper kill from a parachuting PCZ_Jimlad, relieving the pressures on a besieged US base.

Quite a lot of entrants into the star player list this month, with [sco]dodster, Muad'Dib, RAVENCDF, Sgt.Shootu, [SSM]+FireBoy, [HeMan]Mongoose and

VNMIUKIMuffin all making their names heard above the mayhem. Nice to see we attract so many of you clan types out there – if only we were as organised. That said, our very own Phil 'Wandy' Wand put on a bravura performance, consistently topping the leaderboard and restoring a little pride to our ranks.

■ If you're an eagle-eyed reader, you may have spotted something interesting in the upcoming event listings below. A newcomer to the ZoneGames listings in the shape of the 150-player madness that is *Joint Ops* (see review on page 96). One complaint we often get with these things is from people who can't get on as the servers fill up. Well, with 150 slots open in each map, that should be enough space for one and all.

■ As always, to take part in Fight Club, or to find the connection details for all our public game servers, just aim your Web browser at www.zonegames.co.uk where all shall be revealed. To arms!

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO

Paul Presley	Prezzer
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	Jimlad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Phil Wand	Wandy
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat
Michael Filby	Parallax



Bring on the ZONE army!



Prezzer dispatches [HeMan]Mongoose in style.



Ant feels the sharp end of Will's tank barrel.



Jimlad vows never to ride in a helicopter again.

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY AUGUST 5

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Summer Special Free-For-All

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 9

6.30pm – 9.00pm

UT 2004

THURSDAY OCTOBER 7

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Joint Operations – Typhoon Rising



Prezzer and Sgt.Shootu go for a ride.

ZONECHAT

THEY'VE GOT MORE RABBIT THAN SAINSBURY'S...

TIME-KEEPING

has never been our strong point, so it was with sheepish grins and hurried apologies that Will and Prezzer finally made it into the chat room half an hour later than scheduled after pressing magazine matters kept us away.

Not that it mattered. The latest ZONE Chat was one of the most enjoyable yet, mainly down to the surprise appearance of ZONE's very own agony aunt - Dear Willdre - making a guest appearance. Problems were aired, worries were soothed and the travails of the gaming fraternity were put to rights.

Meanwhile, Prezzer was recounting his E3 experiences, including his brushes with fame (in the shape of Vin Diesel and Gary Coleman) and the games that caught his eye. This was before the conversation drifted towards Prezzer's other favourite topic - Bond, James Bond - and a half-hour rant about the merits of Timothy Dalton's brief (and criminally underrated) stint in the role.

The next ZONE Chat is on August 11, from 5-7pm in the usual #pcz channel. We'll have fun, games, maybe another visit from Dear Willdre and even a competition or two...



**WEDNESDAY
AUGUST 11
5.00PM - 7.00PM**

If an offer like that is far too good to turn down and you want to take part, you need an IRC

program - we recommend mIRC (www.mirc.com) as the most straightforward and easy to use. Once installed and set up, log on to irc.uk.quakenet.org then type /join #pcz to enter the PC ZONE channel. You'll find a warm

welcome from all the ZONE channel regulars and may even get to spot an actual ZONE staffer popping in from time to time. Chat's the way to do it! (Fired - Ed.)

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL TAKES OFF FOR FOREIGN LANS...

■ www.centralanuk.co.uk takes place between August 6-8, with up to 44 players set to battle it out at Moorlands Village Hall in Bagnall. It costs just £25 to book a place at the event, and you can even rent out a monitor to save you lugging your own half way up the country. Check the site for further details.

■ The folk at www.triggerhappy.lans.co.uk are running their next event from July 31-August 1. Entry costs £15, but all the proceeds go to charity mate, which makes it all the more worthwhile. There are only (!) 50 slots available, so if you can make it to Chepstow in Wales, do so.

■ LAN Rover regular Westlan (www.westlan.co.uk) has another event, this time from August 6-8 in Lymington, near Exeter. 38 places are available at Lymplon 15, all for a measly £15 a head.

■ Also making another appearance in these pages is Wolfan - www.wolfan.com. Wolfan7 takes place between July 23-25 at New Ollerton. The website has most of the pricing details, so check it out.

■ Southampton is the location for www.thebiggame.org on the weekend of July 30-August 1. £25 buys you one of the 80 slots available at the Hedge End event - then you can just sit back, relax and take aim.

■ Watch out for news next month of an exciting www.ggfan.co.uk event, when I'll be giving details of my first 50-person event in Mile End, East London. If you fancy coming along and not paying, there are five free places up for grabs for the clan that answers this question first: which LAN party does Scalper organise? (Easy, eh?)

■ I'm off now to pack for my summer holiday. I wonder if I should take my laptop just in case I can find a Spanish LAN party? If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@ggfan.co.uk - Scalper out.



It's a tough life at Trigger Happy LAN...

GUILDHALL



▲ WHEN AN ARMY OF ONE ISN'T ENOUGH

Fed up being crushed at *Counter-Strike*? Had enough of being beaten at *Battlefield Vietnam*? Looking to crack some cranium in *Call Of Duty*? Then maybe some of the following guilds, clans and gaming groups can be of assistance. Don't forget, it's not just about shooters. MMORPG guilds are welcome to advertise here too...

CLAN <[nWo]> Clan

CONTACT seventyone_4@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.nwo-clan.org.uk

MAIN GAME MOH: AA & Spearhead, Call Of Duty, BF Vietnam

DETAILS <[nWo]> is a new clan on the lookout for new players to recruit into the fold. So if you want to join a clan that plays for fun, or challenge us to a match, feel free to visit our site and leave your details. You won't be disappointed.

CLAN WWSI (we were soldiers)

CONTACT koolkatbinky@hotmail.com,

dilbert@wvs-clan.com

WEBSITE www.wvs-clan.com

MAIN GAME Battlefield 1942, Battlefield Vietnam

DETAILS WWSI is a new clan to the Vietnam scene, but most of our members have years of experience playing in clans. WWSI is currently in the Clanbase UK league for Battlefield 1942 and the European league for Vietnam. WWSI is also looking for any friendly matches and is recruiting new members for both Vietnam and BF1942.

CLAN Battlefield Mercenaries

CONTACT mmenglishmuffin@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.bfmercs.com

MAIN GAME Battlefield 1942, Battlefield Vietnam

DETAILS We're an old BF1942 clan and have now expanded to BFV. We've recently joined the Enemy Down ladder and have clan wars lined up. We're a friendly but hardcore fighting unit with players from around the UK and Europe and we need more experienced mercenaries for our Battlefield Vietnam team.

CLAN Badacid (BA)

CONTACT Typhoid@badacid.net

WEBSITE www.badacid.net

MAIN GAME Call Of Duty

DETAILS We're a Euro COD clan, active in many leagues and cups. Established for more than two years, we've got lots of experience online and attend LANs regularly. Visit our website, join the forums and the fun. If you're looking for a friendly clan and server, see {BA}!

CLAN =ALX= (assault legion x)

CONTACT cra@mail.yellowstone.net

WEBSITE n/a

MAIN GAME Battlefield Vietnam

DETAILS At the moment we have nine members in =ALX=. Plus, we have our own Ventrilo server, so we speak to each other to discuss tactics and plans. We also have our own dedicated BFV server called 'alx clan server', which is also used for clan wars. Join our clan today and be one of the best!

CLAN Spawn of Satan (SOS)

CONTACT avp2_sos@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.sos-1.net/forums/

MAIN GAME Aliens Vs. Predator 2

DETAILS Started by a guy (me) who listened to too much Slipknot, we're looking for people that still hold faithful to AVP2 and just want a laugh at playing other clans without too much pressure. We also play Warcraft III.

To feature in Guildhall, send your details and no more than 50 words on your group to: online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE



We're back! Bigger, louder and better than ever...

LIKE A majestic phoenix rising from the ashes of lessons learnt, the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge has returned! Yes folks, we couldn't let it end like that. Such effort, such trials, such tribulations. What doesn't kill us only makes us stronger and all that. We've spent the last few months locked in a steel cage with the good burghers at Jolt, hammering out the details, dotting the T's and crossing the I's (*Bodes well - Ed.*). So much so, we're now confident that we've turned Readers' Challenge into the all-conquering competitive gaming behemoth it was always destined to be.

First up, the ladders are gone. The PCZRC (we pronounce it 'pic-zric', but feel free to come up with your own fun verbal utterances) is now a series of regular monthly knockout tournaments.

Second, the prize fund has now risen to the kind of heights the National Lottery can only dream about. Every month, there are going to be fantastic prizes on offer, from the world's leading hardware, software and peripheral manufactures. In the first month alone you can get your hands on Radeon 9600 graphics cards, Sound Blaster Audigy 2 soundcards, Logitech performance mice, MSI motherboards and loads, loads more!

Finally, we'll be featuring an unbeatable mixture of the very latest and the all-time best games to compete in.

The first month sees 5v5 CTF contests in both *UT2004* and *Quake III*, and one-on-one deathmatches in *Painkiller*.

Sign-ups for the first month should be underway now, so head to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk for the full details of how to join in, what prizes are on offer and what the game rules are. We'll be bringing you the results of each month's action right here, along with a full list of all the winners. So what are you waiting for? Get fragging now!

**SIGN UP AT
www.pczone.jolt.co.uk
TODAY!**



Five-on-five action in the age-old classic, *Quake III*.



Get your team together and get it on in *UT2004*.



One-on-one deathmatches with *Painkiller*.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES



The V9950 series from leading Graphic Card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level.



The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and is the world's most highly-rated memory chip.



Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS soundcards, combined with Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio performance for gamers.



Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard.



From one of the worldwide leaders in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors.



Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) and maximum bass response - enhanced for gaming.



The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and ensures quality performance all round.



The home of Online Gaming, Jolt provides services from basic Quake clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions.

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■ £34.99 | Pub: NovaLogic | Dev: NovaLogic | ETA: Out Now | www.novalogic.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.2 GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB DX9-compatible 3D card, 56k modem
DESIRES P4 2.4 GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB DX9-compatible 3D card, ADSL/cable modem

More Sunday roast than rolling your own, Richie Shoemaker's sense of responsibility makes him ideal soldier material



Everybody dance now!



IT'S NO secret that I've never been much of a fan of NovaLogic's games, especially the over-simplified arcade leanings of the *Delta Force* series. So I approached *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising* with a degree of trepidation. The fact that the game uses a modified version of the *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* engine and the blatant way it appeared to ape the gameplay of the *Battlefield* series did little to alleviate tensions either. After all, why should I get excited when there are couple of highly accomplished mods for *BF1942* that cover much the same contemporary ground?

As it turns out, I found myself not just mildly entertained but actually gripped by the turmoil of a near-future Indonesia. While *Joint Ops* does indeed beg, borrow and steal a great deal from our favourite combined arms shooter, it has much more



"I told you, this car park is FULL!"

going for it than just the modern-day tropical setting.

As ever NovaLogic's figures are impressive. Maps up to 50 square kilometres in size and able to service up to 150 players, each of which are able to gain entry to 29 types of drivable vehicle – from Jeeps and amphibious ATVs to patrol boats, hovercraft and helicopters.

NO, YOU DRIVE

Unlike in *Battlefield*, most vehicles can seat an impressive number of players, almost all of whom are able to pop a few shots off from their seat. And because there are no tanks being constantly repaired by a pit crew of engineers following close behind, players are more willing to enjoy themselves on foot, encouraged by the fact that most of the vehicles are highly susceptible to infantry attack

and the maps so dense with foliage that trudging is often the safest way around.

DEAD TIME

Despite the finely tuned balance between soldier and vehicular combat, *Joint Ops* is far from faultless. As is so often the case where telescopic sights are issued freely, sniping is a constant frustration. Stomping off to take an objective, only to meet a sniper's bullet time and time again is pretty irritating, and can result in many minutes of 'dead time'.

One might also suggest that although the game rightly favours the foot soldier, the vehicles could do with a little extra beef and certainly have need of some attention to the handling. Helicopters aside, everything drives like a souped-up hover-tank.



That gun might need some repairs.



"Curse you, I called shotgun!"

Such issues, plus the numerous bugs – the most annoying of which is the dodgy collision detection of the various vehicles – are sure to be addressed if they haven't been already by the time you read this. Nevertheless, *Joint Ops* already shows a lot of promise, and can certainly lay claim to being the most realistic and tactical of the current crop of multiplayer team-based shooters. *UT2004* may still be the most balls-out fun to play and *Battlefield 1942* probably has the edge in terms of variety, but *Joint Ops* is certainly a worthwhile contender. **EW**

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Reviewed Issue 141, Score 87%
 The *Battlefield 1942* formula hasn't worked in the jungles of south-east Asia as well as it has in other parts of the globe, simply because 'Nam was a grunts' war and *Battlefield* is not really suited to being on foot.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 91%
 Insanely frantic and overflowing with sci-fi glitz, *UT2004*'s Assault mode is pick-up-and-play vehicular mayhem at its very best.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The servers are stable and heavily populated
- ✓ Poised player classes and a range of vehicles
- ✓ Diverse, despite the predominantly sweaty setting
- ✗ Damn snipers are everywhere
- ✗ The vehicles could do with some patch love

83

The battle is won, but the war is not yet over



Cover is all-important, but barrels? They explode man!



SÖLDNER: SECRET WARS

£29.99 | Pub: JoWood/BigBen Interactive | Dev: Wings Simulations
ETA: Out Now | www.secretwars.net

REQUIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB DX8.1-compatible 3D card, 56k modem
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB DX8.1-compatible 3D card, broadband

Everything you could ever want in a shooter, plus a few things you'd rather not. **Richie Shoemaker** takes aim

FIRST there was *Battlefield 1942*, then *PlanetSide*, now bringing up the rear is *Söldner*, the latest first-person shooter to jump on the 'let's add loads of vehicles and wide-open spaces to get lost in' bandwagon.

Actually, compared to what's gone before, this German-

crafted game adds many a welcome feature that, in theory, might improve the likes of *Battlefield* a great deal more. The buildings are all fully destructible, a shell fired at the ground leaves a crater for troops to huddle in and there's a very powerful command feature that means one player can order and keep track of his team-mates – even issuing them with equipment should they request it.

What's more, with dozens of weapons, class-based character customisation and over 70 vehicles to climb into, from jeeps and tanks, to helicopters and fighter planes, *Söldner* is probably the most comprehensive game in its class. It's also the worst by quite a considerable margin.

FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS

Let's start with the best bits and work our way down. The command feature works very

well, it has to be said, although teamwork was rarely in evidence – which is down to the fact that most players are still finding their way. In the air, the game is rather enjoyable too, with aircraft that are far easier to master than in *Battlefield Vietnam* – the ability to bail from a plane and open your parachute late to make a stealthy landing is probably one of the game's best experiences.

Not much else measures up to that promise, sadly. First, the graphics... Well, they do the job, but they're unlikely to test even the most mediocre of graphics cards. The maps are suitably big, but the detail is basic and the gameworld as a whole feels unrealised and cheap. The mechanics of the game are even less impressive – vehicle handling is laughably simplistic and far too sensitive, buildings come apart in the most unconvincing way, fences disappear rather than

If you want to fly one of these you need a lot of money.



Aaah, bliss. This is the way to fight a war.

attempt to fall over and when you aim your cannon at the ground a crater does appear, but try and dig another and the cursor won't allow it.

QUIET PLEASE

Then there are the play issues, the chronic imbalance between player classes (the whole game is a sniper's love-in), getting stuck among felled trees, the abysmal single-player game... Worst of all is the voice that announces you in and out of each game. "Zzzoldner!" it barks. Well, it drove me mad anyway.

Out of the box the game is bugged beyond belief and although the recent patch has staved off a few stability and lag issues, it's going to take a lot more work before *Söldner* is able to take numbers away from

UT2004 and *Battlefield*. Which is a shame, because as a team game it has the potential to be the best. Sadly, it's the execution rather than the ideals we have to honour – and while *Söldner* boasts a wealth of impressive-sounding features, the playing experience is anything but. **PZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent command options
- ✓ Parachuting is fun
- ✗ Unbalanced
- ✗ Abysmal vehicle handling
- ✗ Pre-millennial graphics

40

All bark and no bite



WORLD WAR II ONLINE V1.14



■ \$12.99 a month | Pub: Strategy First | Dev: Cornered Rat Software |
ETA: Out Now | www.wwiionline.com

REQUIRES PII 400MHz, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card and a 56k modem

DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D Card, joystick (with throttle and rudder control) and broadband

Can a four-year-old game, designed for both Mac and PC, stay fresh after all this time? Daniel Emery takes a sneaky peek at the sell-by date...



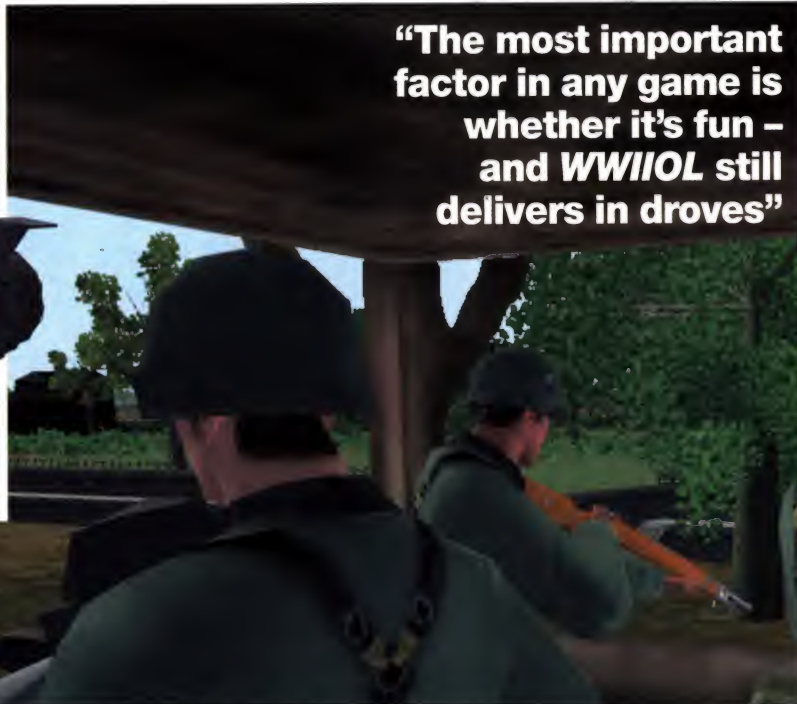
Keeping an eye on friendly tank movements.



The lack of shadows does look a bit odd.



Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler...



The new command system makes for tighter teamwork.

"The most important factor in any game is whether it's fun – and WWIOL still delivers in droves"

INPERSPECTIVE

WARBIRDS 2004

Reviewed Issue 144, Score 75%

One of the few MMOWWII games that combines land and air combat, this is heavily stacked towards the flight sim. Better-looking than WWIOL, but it lacks player numbers and depth. Great for the propeller-head club, not much fun for everyone else.

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%

Massively multiplayer war, but in the future rather than history. Much like WWIOL, you can fight in the air, on the land, but not – yet – in the sea. Suffers from long-term exhaustion, but for the first four to five months it's the best game ever made.

FOUR YEARS ago, when Cornered Rat Software announced it was developing a persistent universe, massively multiplayer online WWII strategy shooter, most people said it couldn't be done. The idea was too grandiose; WWII wasn't a popular time frame; the flight sim was dead etc. Well, it's proved the critics wrong – at least, in part.

The first release was plagued with disasters, caused in part by financial pressure to get the game out the door. It was, to all intents and purposes, unfinished. Copies were returned, flame wars ignited and journalists started looking smug

with that 'I told you so...' expression on their faces.

Many revisions down the line, though, and the game's shaped up. So much so, that the developer's released the latest upgrade – v1.14 – and while it's not a quantum leap, it is another step down the evolution road in terms of graphics.

WWII IN COLOUR

However, before we start describing the changes, it's worth stepping back and having a long, hard look at the game. When WWIOL was developed, Cornered Rat Software took the unusual step of making it both PC and Mac-compatible (a throwback to its days on the *WarBirds* series). While this may have increased its subscriber base – there are an awful lot of Mac gamers in the US – it seriously hamstrung the look and feel of the game.

Four years on and age was seriously starting to take its toll. Graphically, it's been overtaken

by almost every other game, although that's not to say the game isn't eminently playable.

ABOUT TURN

Since we last reviewed WWIOL, the game's undergone many changes, including the cosmetic. For a start, the trees, shrubs and buildings now look far better than the basic textured models we've been stuck with for the past half decade.

There's also the addition of new functions, most of which are at a command level. While this won't be very obvious if you're new to this – you fight where you're told to – it does make for some entertaining gameplay. The new Fallback command enables defenders to retreat into a town, but gives them new spawn points. This then turns the tables on attackers, forcing them to defend. There's also been some work on munitions: grenades now fire shrapnel and the gunnery has been tweaked.

But the most important factor in any game is whether it's fun – and WWIOL still delivers this in droves. Whether it's flying fighter cover over the battlefield or hunkering down with your rifle as the enemy tries to storm the town, that whole element of adrenalin and teamwork is still there. It's an enjoyable and addictive game that boasts substantial numbers playing at any one time. Which is what WWII was all about, surely? **P2**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge arena
- ✓ Variety of gameplay
- ✓ Clever strategy
- ✗ Sharp learning curve
- ✗ Dated graphics

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War in an old-school style



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS



■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Massive Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | www.groundcontrol2.com | Players: 2-8

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB T&L 3D card and a 56k modem **DESIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

Martin Korda checks out some explosive Swedish online action



Bombs away!

THIS SHOULD be the ultimate online RTS with its frenetic gameplay, lack of resource management and instant access to an entire tech tree. Yet somehow *Ground Control II* has managed to fall well short of expectations due to the fact that there only seem to be two outcomes to any battle.

The first outcome is prevalent when you first dip a tentative green-skinned toe into the piranha-filled cauldron that houses the *Ground Control II* community – also known as

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed: Issue 120, Score 90%

Not many servers, but if you want pure action and strategy without resource management, you can't beat *Medieval*. Broadband is a must, though.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed: Issue 119, Score 85%

Easily the best resource-gathering RTS online, its superb blend of strategy and role-playing elements make it a joy to play.

"Players tend to loiter around like pus-faced teenagers outside McDonald's on a Friday night"

Massgate, developer Massive Entertainment's very own hosting server.

In these situations, more experienced opponents generally tend to rush all of the map's Landing Zones (LZs) and Victory Locations (VLs) within the first two minutes of a game. By minute three it's all over and you find yourself back at the menu screen wondering what happened. Even semi-experienced players can overrun a map in less than five minutes by calling down scores of fast units to the battlefield and sending them to every corner of the map, leaving newcomers surrounded, defeated, and ultimately disillusioned.

THE STALEMATE

Scenario two is actually great fun for the first 30 minutes, as you charge around the map, fortify

your strongholds and engage the enemy in tense, pyrotechnic-packed encounters where superior tactics really do count.

Then, with each side having secured half of the map, you build up an assault force and charge the enemy, confident your massed ranks can puncture a hole in their defences. Problem is, you usually make no impact whatsoever, because like you, the enemy has packed its strategic locations with every type of unit. What this means is no matter what you throw at them, they've always got the advantage, especially if they've worked out the importance of using each vehicle's secondary function which generally furberishes units with massive defence bonuses.



Many units' secondary functions have massive defence bonuses.



Larger battles are incredible and tactics can play a major role.

And so, hour after tedious hour, you and the enemy launch daring yet futile attacks on each other, until someone gets bored and quits.

BIG MAC AND FRIES

Finding available servers isn't the easiest thing to do either, as most players tend to loiter around Massgate's menu screen like pus-faced teenagers

outside McDonald's on a Friday night, full of pubescent bluster, but utterly incapable of organising a game. What's more, there's no option to play as the Imperial Empire, meaning you only have two sides to choose from, NSA or Viron.

It's such a shame, as multiplayer *GCII* should have been so much better. Sadly though, it all becomes too

predictable too soon, and it's rare (but not impossible) to find an exciting skirmish. The potential for greatness is clearly there, but until Massive rethinks *GCII*'s multiplayer options, it'll remain little more than an occasionally entertaining, but often frustrating pastime. **7/10**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Frenetic gameplay
- ✓ Requires proper tactics to succeed
- ✗ Games either too short or painfully long
- ✗ No way of gauging quality of the opposition before playing
- ✗ Sometimes difficult to get a decent game
- ✗ You can't play as the Imperial Empire

SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE	84
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	58

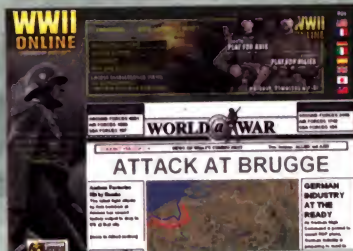
Getting started in... WORLD WAR II ONLINE

ON THE
DVD

Atten-hut! You're in the army now soldier!
Daniel Emery takes you through some basic training for the war-themed MMOG...

LOGGING ON

1 Starting a game of *WWIIOL* can be a little complicated, and for a first-time player it can be quite infuriating. Once you've installed *WWIIOL* (full software on the cover DVD), you need to install the PlayNet client. Then, after that, you go to the *WWIIOL* log-in page at www.wwiionline.com – and from there you decide whether to play for the Axis or Allies. You're then taken into the game and it's time to decide which branch of the armed forces to join – army, navy or air force – and pick one of the pre-designated missions.



THE TRAINING ARENA

2 Before you think of setting foot in the main arena, you need to take time out to read the training manual – and a lot of time to practise in the training arena. This isn't just to minimise embarrassment when you go into the main arena, though. Each team has only limited resources, and so crashing five precious fighters before you work out how to take off will make you as popular as a randy dog in a Miss Lovely Legs contest. There's scheduled free training most weekends – we cannot recommend taking part highly enough.



THE ARMY

3 Unless you've been playing online flight sims for a while, the army's going to be your first port of call. There are two main sub-sections – vehicles and troops – and the way they operate is rather different. The best place to cut your teeth is as a footslogger. Play wise: it's almost identical to most first-person shooters, so you can pick things up fast. On a more strategic level, ground troops are almost limitless, while ground vehicles are a finite resource (although not as scarce as aircraft). Again, practise offline lots before clambering into a tank online.



THE AIR FORCE

4 This is the most decisive (and the hardest) branch of the game. You can fly either as a fighter or bomber (although the fighters all have the capability of strafing ground troops) and at best, you're going to be armed with machine guns, cannons and simple toss-bombs. What's more, both sides are limited in the number of aircraft available (not to mention your in-game rank influencing what's on offer). While bombers make a bigger impact on the overall battle, there's no denying the rush of air-to-air combat in a fighter. Again, lots of offline practise is needed, because the enemy is rather good.

IN THE NAVY...

5 This is probably the most neglected, yet potentially devastating branch of the armed forces. Although the vast majority of combat takes place on land or in the sky, there are two places the navy comes into its own: coastal towns and rivers. A well-positioned Motor Gun Boat, bristling with machine guns and cannons can stop an enemy assault dead in its tracks – ideal when defending bridges. However, there's only a few types of naval vessel available at present, although once the game moves into the Pacific theatre, you can expect the list to expand exponentially.



WINNERN, SIE SICH
DIE RATTEN SIND
IHRE FREUNDE!

Rank Symbol	In-game icon	Rank Name
		Private
		Private 1st Cl.
		Corporal
		Sergeant
		Lieutenant
		Captain
		Major
		Lieutenant Colonel
		Colonel
		Brigadier General
		Major General
		Lieutenant General
		General

RANKING UP

6 *WWIIOL* isn't just a first-person shooter: there's also an element of RPG thrown in. Each game you play gives you 'points'. These are granted for survival (more than ten minutes), kills and helping complete a mission. As you accumulate points, you eventually get promoted to the next rank. In the early stages, this unlocks new units – for instance, make it to corporal and you can choose either a rifleman or sapper. Become an officer and you can start choosing and directing missions. Unlike most frag-fests, survival is almost more important than killing the enemy.



EYES, EARS AND BRAIN

7 Take some time to read through the descriptions of the different units. A tank may be a tank, but not all vehicles are created equal. A German Panzer III might be a good tank killer, but it's not fantastic against swarms of troops. Conversely, an assault gun may make mincemeat of soft targets, but it's going to bang harmlessly off an armour-plated reconnaissance car (unless you get lucky). Not only should you know the capabilities of your machine, but you need to recognise the enemy too. Just to give the whole thing an extra twist, German engines sound very different from Allied ones.

SQUADRONS

8 Once you get to grips with the basics, it's time to join the community. While being a one-man band is fun, there's not much to compare with an organised raid with 20 of your mates. Organisation and teamwork is key to *WWIIOL*. Instead of clans, groups of players are called squadrons – be they air, land or sea-based. There are two ways you can approach this: either hang about in the game until you meet a group of like-minded people, or head on over to services.wwiionline.org where there's a list of every squad in the game.

GO WITH THE FLOW

9 If you want to progress through the game, you're going to need to be both versatile and flexible. While you may enjoy pottering about in your Panzer tank, there are times when you need to hop into an Opal truck and ferry troops to the front, or grab your rifle and dig in for some hard defence. Check out the mission list when you first log in. Not only does this take you to the thick of the action, but bonus points are also awarded for successfully completing the mission.

DUCK AND COVER

10 There's nothing more amusing than watching a new player go charging across the battlefield standing up. They usually have a life expectancy measured in nano-seconds. Go prone if you're exposed



COMMUNITY CHEST



MEDAL OF HONOR

Lying face down in the sand soaking up the bullets? Dan Emery likes nothing better...

Since *Medal Of Honor* stormed onto our shores, it's scored a massive fanbase and spawned numerous new versions: despite fierce competition, it still reigns. Following on from this popularity, the developer added a batch of modding and editing tools, which, unsurprisingly, have been taken full advantage of.

The various resources for *MOH* range from the very good to the downright awful. And while we had to endure the smug satisfaction of PlayStation owners when *MOH* was first released two years before its PC debut, the boot's now on the other foot. We've got new weapons, maps and TCs – and they've got... Well, sod all.



HELL IN THE PACIFIC (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.modtheater.com

Hell In The Pacific is a total conversion for *MOH: Allied Assault* that changes the setting from Europe to the Far East, where US Marines were locked in a fight to the death with Imperial Japan. A great TC, this should keep all *MOH* fans happy until the release of *MOH: Pacific Assault*.



THE MAFIA (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.mafiamedia.tk

At the time of going to press, *The Mafia* was about 90 per cent finished – but the developer was planning for a July release, so with luck it should be ready by now. This TC replaces the Allies vs Axis with Cops vs Robbers. Sawm-off shotguns, police pistols and the famous Tommy Gun in full effect. Sweet!



COOL MODS (MOD)

moh.cool-mods.com

This is a pack of over 200 mods for *MOH: Allied Assault*. The 27MB download is designed for you if you plan to host your own *MOH:AA* games, but there are some clientside-only mods too. There's new skins, blood and enabling/disabling scope sights. Basically, you can tweak the game to your heart's content.



MOH FILES (WEBSITE)

moh.filefront.com

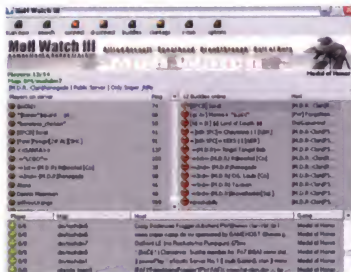
If there's a download that's *Medal Of Honor*-related, you'll find it on *MOH Files*. We started counting, but after the 10,000th entry, we gave up and had a beer instead. There's a vast array of skins included here – from Gestapo to Special Forces, screensavers and the all-important Blood Mod.



PLANET MEDAL OF HONOR (WEBSITE)

www.planetmedalofhonor.com

Going head-to-head with *MOH Files* is Planet *MOH*, which has practically every level, map, skin and TC made for *MOH*. There's a fine collection of screenshots, a top-notch installation guide for adding mods and a countdown timer for the release of *MOH: Pacific Assault*.



MOH WATCH III (UTILITY)

www.moh-tools.de.vu

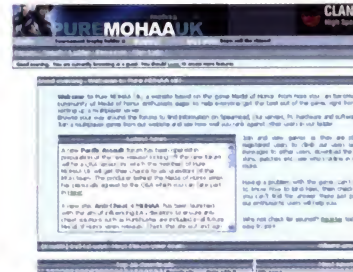
A fantastic utility and a stalkers delight for all versions of *MOH*. *MOH Watch* enables you to monitor your favourite servers and keep an eye on when your sparring partners/clan members log on and which server they log into. With a wide range of server commands, it's an essential tool if you're running a dedicated *MOH* host.



MOH FOR DUMMIES (UTILITY)

www.ric-hard.tk

Another great tool for both servers and general players, *MOH For Dummies* helps you restart maps, chose skins, run a server, set frag limits, customise games and run things the way you want them. And all this through an easy to use GUI too – smart. Despite the name.



PURE MOHAA UK (WEBSITE)

www.pure-mohaa.co.uk

Last, but by no means least, is the UK's very own *MOH* fan site. Not only is it staffed by some very friendly chaps, but the downloads have a distinctly British feel to them: from the Operation Sea Lion mod through to a map set in the back streets of London. All jolly spiffing, I'm sure you'll agree.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill's holding out for a hero.
Luckily, there's a city full of 'em...

"WELCOME to Paragon City! Heroes are needed! Apply within." The superhero-based MMOG of *City Of Heroes* certainly makes an offer not to be scoffed at. Righting wrongs, rescuing the beleaguered and fighting the forces of evil. Best of all, you get to dress up.

In my case, this involves sporting little more than knee-length boots, a pair of skin-tight low-riders and a cowboy hat. The *ZONE* minions have been at it again, and I enter this world as The Pink Projectile, possibly the world's first openly gay superhero. We've always had our suspicions about Batman and Robin, but there's no suppressed shit with The Pink Projectile. I'm not so much out of the closet as standing on top of it singing YMCA.



The Pink Projectile gets his leg up, if not quite over.



As chat-up lines go, we've heard better...

On the face of it, Paragon City would appear to provide rich pickings for a potential cottager. Boasting more spandex than a Poison gig, it's something of a fantasy Hampstead Heath – and things immediately look up when I spot a character calling himself The Sodumizer (sic). He may not be able to spell, but it's not his literary skills that interest me as I make eyes across a crowded forecourt. He doesn't respond though, preferring the company of mutants and fag-hags. Bigger him.

Reassuringly, it seems I'm not the only person boasting – unsuccessfully – on other citizens. A smartly-dressed

character calling himself William Clinton is harassing an attractive woman with the opening gambit: "Ever consider being an intern, Delilah?" He follows this with: "Care for a cigar, Delilah?" Nice work, Bill.

LET'S GO OUTSIDE

Following George Michael's example, I head to Atlas Park in search of some cubicle-based

up my odds: a big pink man against a pair of axe-wielding thugs. There isn't much time to think about it as they set about budgeoning me in the street. They haven't accounted for the power of pink though, and with a few well-aimed Cobra Strikes and Storm Kicks the aggressors are spread all over the sidewalk. Nobody messes with The Pink Projectile.

"With more spandex than a Poison gig, *City Of Heroes* is like a fantasy Hampstead Heath"

action. It's a non-starter though, as it's not equipped with even the most rudimentary facilities. Presumably superheroes don't shit. I do bump into Mr Flash though, a classic square-jawed, tights-wearing hero.

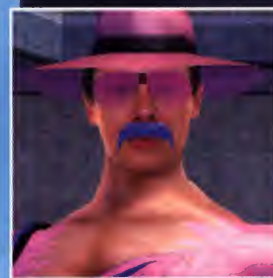
"Looking good," I proffer, to which Flash replies: "What can I do to thank you?" We're under starter's orders here! Composing myself, I reply. "Anything you want..."

Flash isn't having it though, and sets off on his heels, stricken with panic. He certainly lives up to his name, and although I give gainful chase, he's soon out of sight.

WE COULD BE HEROES

While pursuing him, I appear to have strayed into an unsavoury part of town and begin to feel threatening eyes staring at me, despite my understated appearance. A voice rings out: "I smell spandex." Attempting to maintain my composure, I mince cautiously along the pavement, but am confronted by a pair of nasties in the shape of Blood Brother Slicer and Blood Brother Chopper.

Frozen to the spot, I weigh




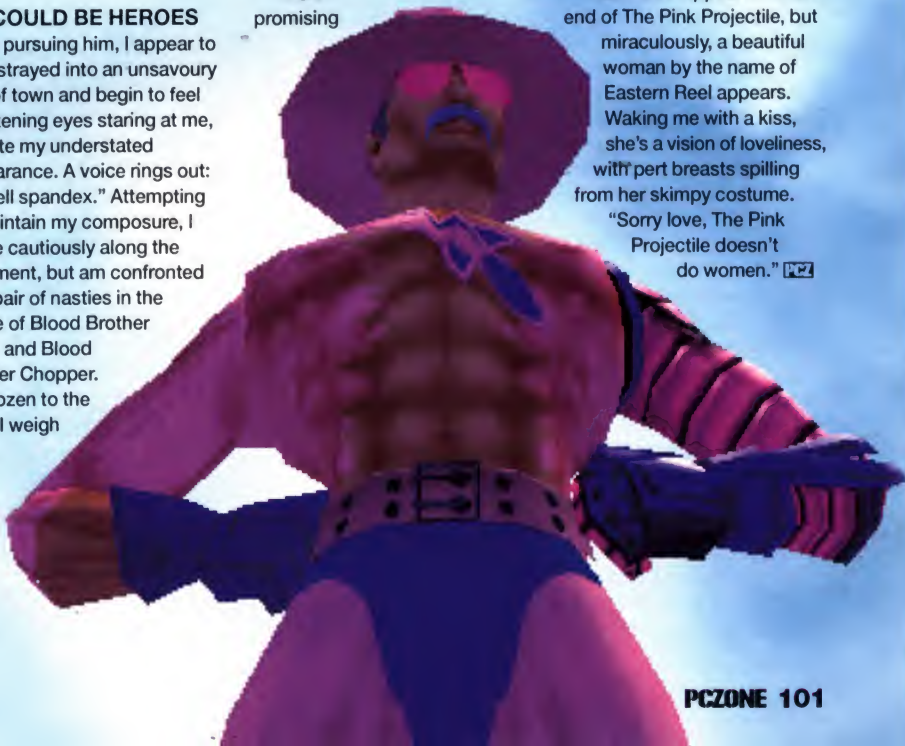
is the equally pink Pretty Boi, but he doesn't hang about either. Likewise, the hulking Ten who isn't impressed to be asked: "Aren't you a big one?"

It's not looking good, and things don't improve when I stumble into another gang of Blood Brothers, hell-bent on revenge. This time they're not few, they're legion, and I'm subject to a vicious act of queer-bashing, waking up in hospital pissing blood and eating through a straw.

I'M A LAYDEE!

Deciding to get a proper job, I head for the sewers to fight crime, charged with the task of flushing out a gang of wrong 'uns. Spotting my first love Mr Flash taking a hiding, I wade in. It seems that I'm neither a lover nor a fighter, and I again take an absolute shoeing, left for dead literally face down in the shit.

That would appear to be the end of The Pink Projectile, but miraculously, a beautiful woman by the name of Eastern Reel appears. Waking me with a kiss, she's a vision of loveliness, with pert breasts spilling from her skimpy costume. "Sorry love, The Pink Projectile doesn't do women." 



HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

LARGER
THAN
LIFE



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ Naysayers may well denounce the 20.1-inch ViewSonic screen reviewed on page 106 as an extravagance, but it actually makes more sense than spending the same money on your PC. Think about it. A panel of that size will greatly enhance your overall computing pleasure whether you're playing games, watching movies or just spreading windows around your desktop. Most importantly, the big ViewSonic and others like it will last more than a decade. When could you last say that about something you pushed inside your case?

With a native resolution of 1600x1200, it's an ideal partner for the latest crop of ATI and NVIDIA video cards, the best of which are able to run full detail at that size. Plus, let's not forget that a 20-inch LCD delivers the same viewable area as a 22-inch CRT. Quite honestly, there's no rush to hose your hard-earned on new processors and new motherboards when the games that make proper use of them won't be around until August, and when emerging technologies such as Intel's new 925X Express chipset are really just the messenger boys for an army of new technology.

If you read this column last month, you may recall I was having an unlucky time trying to get a wireless LAN set up. Luckily, the retailers I'd been dealing with (DSL Warehouse, scan.co.uk and ebayer) had slick returns procedures for all the duff hardware. To make things worse, the Belkin router began exhibiting the same problems that a number of other people were reporting on forums and in the newsgroups, so that needed to go back too. In short, I sent back everything I'd bought and started over.

When buying online, make sure you check the small print, and don't forget that under the Distance Selling Regulations, you have the right to reject goods you've bought within seven days of purchase. And if you come unstuck, remember to drop Watchdog a line (see p110).

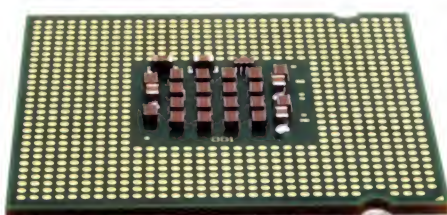
All Abroad The Express Train

New-look Pentiums, a gamer-oriented chipset, DDR2 memory, integrated wireless and PCI Express. And it's all available today...

INTEL DESCRIBES it as "one of the most significant PC platform changes in a decade", and initially it's hard to disagree. The company's 915 G/P and power-user 925X Express chipsets, formerly known as Grantsdale and Alderwood, are now on motherboards at retailers and support a rebadged, re-engineered range of Pentium processors.

Intel's barking mad marketing department has opted for an identical naming convention to car maker BMW AG, and henceforth the new P4 chips will be known as the 3-series, 5-series and 7-series – there's even a 735, a 530 and a 325. The 3-series refers to Celeron D processors, the 5-series to Pentium 4 processors with Hyper-Threading, and the 7-series to the Pentium M processor for notebooks.

The new 5xx (5-series) processors feature a grid of smooth contact pads rather than the bed of pins you're used to and



The new P4 chip does away with spikes and is more robust as a result.



Intel's D925XCV motherboard features the company's 925X Express chipset. And that's magic.

connect to the motherboard using Socket T. What's more, CPU coolers are no longer attached with a clasp, but are anchored straight through the motherboard and at long last feature software-adjustable fan speed.

SEEING DOUBLE

Eight channel surround sound features on both the 915 and 925-based boards. Intel has also provided a way for you to reassign audio jacks, meaning you don't have to remember which socket is for input and which is for output – if you get it wrong, you can simply swap them around without having to duck down behind your PC.

The company's Wireless Connect technology also permits the system to act as a wireless access point, sharing devices and Internet connection, as well as

enabling external users with wireless cards to hook up. However, at the moment you need optional Intel peripherals to do this, which is a little odd.

Of most interest to gamers is the PCI Express bus architecture and high frequency DDR2 memory. At the moment, DDR2 is an expensive option and gives no obvious performance gain over existing DDR400 modules (though this is likely to change over time), and PCI Express variants of AGP8x cards are indistinguishable from one another in benchmarks.

So if you sit back, rub your chin and consider that a move to 925X requires a new processor, new motherboard, new memory, new video card and even a new hard drive – there's only one IDE connector on the new design – it suddenly looks rather pricey.

If you add in that Intel has put a clock limiter in the BIOS, meaning you can't tweak more than about 10 per cent, and that somewhat alarmingly the Socket-T connector isn't guaranteed to survive more than 20 CPU insertions, then 925X makes little sense. The real performance gains are to be had at the end of the year, at which time Intel will ramp up the 5-series with a faster bus, fatter cache and 64-bit extensions. Our advice is to sit tight or go with AMD.

WHAT'S ON OFFER

Processor	Frequency	Socket	FSB	On-die Cache
Pentium 4 HT 560	3.60 GHz	LGA775	800 MHz	1MB L2
Pentium 4 HT 550	3.40 GHz	LGA775	800 MHz	1 MB L2
Pentium 4 HT 540	3.20 GHz	LGA775	800 MHz	1 MB L2
Pentium 4 HT 530	3.00 GHz	LGA775	800 MHz	1 MB L2
Pentium 4 HT 520	2.80 GHz	LGA775	800 MHz	1 MB L2

CHIPSET

FEATURES

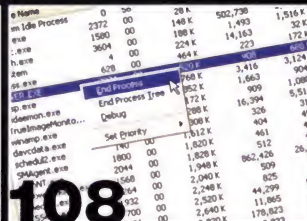
Intel 925X Express ('Alderwood')	915P features plus: high performance desktop chipset, DDR2 RAM only. Does not support DDR1 RAM.
Intel 915G Express ('Grantsdale')	915P features plus: Intel GMA 900 DirectX 9.0 integrated graphics.
Intel 915P Express ('Grantsdale')	800MHz and 533MHz FSB support, dual channel DDR/DDR2 memory, PCI Express bus and x16 graphics, High Definition Audio, Intel Wireless Connect Technology, Intel Matrix Storage Technology, ICH6, support for LGA775 CPUs and HT



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BEAT UP THE CLOCK

NVIDIA to add dynamic overclocking to its 64-bit Athlon boards

IN A MOVE which will surely nudge nForce3 motherboards ahead of rivals in closely-fought AMD64 benchmarks, NVIDIA has announced the addition of AutoTuning to its third generation media and communications processors (MCPs). A software update means that when games and other applications make heavy demands of the CPU, the processor's clock is pushed upwards by an amount preset in the BIOS. Hardware monitoring features ensure the chip won't cook itself.

The new AutoTuning feature arrives at the same time as nForce3 Ultra, a power-user and gamer-oriented MCP featuring gigabit Ethernet and firewall, plus advanced ATA and SATA RAID configurations. Crucially, the nForce3 Ultra is designed for the new 939-pin Athlon chips and no longer requires registered RAM.

Aimed principally at AMD Athlon 64 FX 53 owners, NVIDIA is hoping the hot nForce3 variant will give it the edge over rival chipsets from VIA and SiS. The only

fly in the ointment is the ridiculously high cost of the processors – a 939-pin FX 53 costs close to £600.



The nForce3 ramps the processor clock up and down without the need for user intervention.

SPEED LIMIT

DVD burners to top out at 16x burning

WITH SPEED-HIKED DVD burners now appearing at retail stores across the country, you should know that the latest 16x units have run into the same physical limitations experienced by 52x CD-ROM: at 10,000 rpm spindle speeds, going any faster would cause the blank discs to crack and even fall apart. So you're not going to

be going any faster any time soon.

As with their CD counterparts, the most likely result of this brick wall is a reduction in price and the widespread availability of 12x and 16x fast media. With the more recent products capable of writing an entire DVD+R disc in little more than five minutes, and with prices dropping alarmingly (combo writers



Philips was first to market with the double layer 8x drive, and is set to be first with the 16x.

which combine DVD and CD functionality can be had for as little as £40), it might be time to open up your case, pull out that old burner and stick it on eBay.

GOODBYEE!

PC on its last legs

The Wandybox™ (the machine we use to test all our hardware) is on its way out!

Back in the day, the 3.06GHz Pentium 4, D845GEBV2-based system was the fastest desktop money could buy, with Intel's newfangled fancy Hyper-Threading thing easing it out front of AMD rivals. However, after months of hard abuse and an infinite number of card swaps, Old Faithful's AGP slot is as tight as a farmer's welly and the case looks like it was run over with a mower. Twice.

Next month, you'll be able to read about its super-fast, custom-built replacement, but Intel or AMD? NVIDIA or ATI? OCZ or Kingston? I'll keep you guessing.

DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	6.0.1.1002	7-May-04	1.5MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	4.24	10-May-04	20.2MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.51	02-Dec-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.96 Beta	04-Feb-04	2.25MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.6	9-Jun-04	29.6MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	56.72	01-Apr-03	10.9MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADV HD Driver Update	1-84-40	29-Mar-03	6.5MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS



DOUBLE DOUBLE VISION

Last issue, we reported on Alienware's new Video Array technology, essentially a formation of two NV45 chips (ie PCI Express 6800 Ultra) working together on the same motherboard. Now we bring you the first benchmarks conducted by Alienware Labs. According to the company, the Video Array setup increases overall graphics performance by an astonishing 77 per cent, with some benchmarks giving twice the score. With 8x anisotropic filtering and 8x anti-aliasing, the two NV45 GPUs deliver almost half as much grunt again as a single chip, so don't be surprised if other manufacturers go along the same route. Prices are still to be confirmed. www.alienware.com

EYE EYE

If you're confused by all the wireless variants on offer these days, including 802.11a, 802.11b, 802.11g and various manufacturer-specific 802.11g variants, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) has recently approved 802.11i. The latest specification is essentially a new wireless protocol designed to address the widely publicised shortcomings of existing wireless security, and uses low-level AES encryption. The upside is a highly secure network, the downside is a slight performance degradation with decryption requiring extra CPU cycles. 802.11i products should be shipping in time for autumn, and you can expect all flavours of Intel Centrino to be fully compatible. www.ieee.org

LCD PRICE DROP

With a noticeable slump in sales in consecutive months, LCD vendors are likely to cut the cost of flat panel monitors in order to chivy demand for them. According to statistics and views from market analysts, buyers are either waiting on better prices or are going for CRT, where 22-inch models can be had for little more than £300 – less than the cost of most 17-inch LCD screens. It's not known if prices will be greatly affected by shifts in demand, but drops of up to 15 per cent have been predicted, making the most popular screens about £50 cheaper than they are right now.



HEADSETS ROUND-UP

Hello? Can anyone hear me? **Phil Wand** puts six headsets through their paces

EVERYONE'S talking. Thanks to TeamSpeak, TeamSound, Roger Wilco, Game Voice, and let's not forget the guys at Valve, chatting with our cohorts has become a regular part of online gaming. OK, so clan veterans will tell you they've been talking with one another for years, but it was only when voice comms were added to the *Half-Life* engine that the concept went mainstream. Suddenly, players everywhere were shouting, cursing,

singing and playing their favourite Pixies track to everyone on their server, together with distorted replies to shut the hell up. The first few weeks were a nightmarish dash for the mute button, but once the novelty wore off, it became clear that the new feature could turn a good team into an unbeatable one.

Anyone can take advantage of voice comms by simply plugging in a microphone, and while most gamers

will be happy to use the one that came with their soundcard, anyone serious about their gaming should upgrade to a decent headset. Because the microphone is centimetres away from your mouth, you're far more likely to be understood.

We've tested six headsets in all, and found that the audio quality varies considerably. Don't go out and buy the first set you see – read on to find out what you should be looking for.

SOFT IN THE HEAD

All headsets tested featured stereo operation, a microphone on a pivoting boom, plus a remote volume control with mute function. But what else were we looking for?

- **BUILD** How long we think it'll last
- **COMFORT** How long we think you'll last
- **TALKING** How good the microphone is
- **LISTENING** How good the speakers are
- **VALUE** How much bang for your buck

AUDIO 70

■ Price: £16 | Manufacturer: Plantronics
Phone: 0800 410014 | www.plantronics.co.uk

THE AUDIO 70 headset feels pretty sturdy and is a decent price, but rivals a wedgie for comfort. The shape of the hoop is odd, leaving the speakers sitting away from your ears and the sound slightly distant. The microphone boom intrudes into your peripheral vision wherever you position it, and because it's shiny, it's impossible to ignore. Additionally, the connecting cable exits the speaker forward of your cheek, meaning the wire constantly tickles you. As with the Audio 90, the Plantronics set comes with a shirt clip which can be used to secure the lead to your shirt pocket, but it's still poorly thought out in this respect.

Sound quality on the Audio 70 is middling. Explosions and other people talking is fine, but the set is poor for music. As well as requiring the volume cranked unnaturally high before you can hear anything, there's little bass and no sparkle. Increasingly, developers are turning to music to enrich the gaming experience (*Battlefield Vietnam* for example), and a headset should cater for this. Voice quality was deemed to be above average, with other players reporting very clear results.



PREMIUM STEREO HEADSET

■ Price: £35 | Manufacturer: Logitech |
Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

BIT OF AN odd one, this headset. The build quality is fine, with the traditional over-the-head design being familiar, light and fully adjustable. Plus, although the headphones and microphone jacks are not far enough apart (as we've seen with all the Logitech products here), everything points to the Premium Stereo Headset living up to its name. But it doesn't, unfortunately. In actual fact, it's the worst of the bunch.

The main trouble is that the audio quality is on the poor side of mediocre, with music reproduction being especially tinny and without any real sparkle. There's no bass and no shape to the sound, so games are similarly lacklustre. Some of

the more deep and heavy effects from *Desert Combat*, such as the crump of distant artillery, are paper thin. And then there's the £35 price tag, making them the most expensive cans on test – they're more than three times as expensive as the Creative HS300s. Add in the fact that they're not particularly comfortable and it's hard to recommend them. The volume control does include a useful clip, and as expected the noise-cancelling microphone makes it one of the best transmitters here, but there's little else.



AUDIO 90

■ Price: £23 | Manufacturer: Plantronics | Phone: 0800 410014
www.plantronics.co.uk

THE AUDIO 90 set is like a shot in the arm after the Audio 70. The build quality is a couple of rungs higher, with the microphone shielded, out on a deformable black boom, and the earphones padded. It's a slightly old-fashioned design, but is

easily the most comfortable set here and can be worn for hours.

Much of the comfort derives from the speakers being on pivots, allowing them to wiggle to the shape of your head and sit flush against your ears. This perfect fit also means they sound better and allow virtually no noise in from the room. It may not look hip at a LAN party, but they're more suited to a room of hollering lunatics than the Audio 70.

Gaming is rather good, and music is top banana too. They're nowhere near the reference JVC HA-DX3 headphones and you wouldn't want to use them for the ultimate DVD experience, but you really can't go expecting studio quality for just £23. Other people's voices are reproduced very well, with just the right balance of treble and bass, but surprisingly, the voice transmit was slightly muffled, presumably as a result of the shielding on the microphone.



HS300

■ Price: £11 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs
Phone: 0800 376 7954 | uk.europe.creative.com

THE HS300 cans are surprising for two reasons. First, although they trail the others for overall quality, there are nice touches such as the metal clip on the reverse of the volume control – the others are plastic. They're also very light and comfortable, and certainly no bother to wear for long periods of time. Second, the audio is impressive considering the bargain bucket price of little more than a tenner. It's a far more rounded sound than you'd expect, with a decent scoop of bass that doesn't require you to set the volume at three-quarters before you can hear it. Although they're not likely to

punch your ears into your brain, they perform admirably in shooters and do a pleasant enough job reproducing music.

The voice quality is not quite up to the standard set by Logitech, but it's still very good and clear, and certainly a world away from the nasty Creative microphones supplied with Sound Blasters of yore. If you still have that funny little capsule taped to the top of your monitor, you really must consider upgrading to the HS300s or, better still, to the pick of the bunch – the Logitech Extreme PC Gaming Headset. Neither are likely to break the bank.



INTERNET CHAT HEADSET

■ Price: £23 | Manufacturer: Logitech
Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk



I'M NOT sure how the Internet Chat Headset manages to be one-and-a-half times more expensive than the Extreme PC Gaming Headset, but it does. You see, it's pretty much the same product but with multicoloured interchangeable speaker covers – a bunch of replacement shells is provided for you – and a smooth rather than ratcheted boom.

Disappointingly, it lacks the small but handy clip on the back of the other two sets, meaning there's no option but to leave the wire wiggling about in the breeze rather than fastened to your shirt or shirt pocket. The sound quality is indistinguishable from its cheaper brother and the noise-

cancelling microphone is just as effective.

As with all other Logitech sets on test here, the headphones jack is wired far too close to the microphone jack. What this means is that, if you're aiming to connect the former to the satellite control of your speakers, you require a stereo extender to run from the latter back to the microphone socket on your soundcard. It's a minor oversight in the design, but one that's annoying and not present on either of the Plantronics. In summary then, you're better off buying the Extreme.



PCZONE VERDICT 72



PCZONE VERDICT 80

EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET

■ Price: £15 | Manufacturer: Logitech
Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

IT'S NOT clear what's so extreme about the Extreme PC Gaming Headset, nor indeed why it's of particular interest to gamers. There's nothing revolutionary about the design: the headband loops over your ears and round the back of your neck, and the left speaker houses a pivot for a microphone boom. That said, the boom here features a satisfying ratchet which makes it easy to position and keeps it from sagging. What's more, as with all Logitech

headsets, the Extreme features a noise-cancelling microphone that does an exceptional job of reproducing your voice. The boom is also deformable, meaning you can lower the stalk out of your peripheral vision.

The Logitech set is also hugely comfortable, and will fit a wide range of heads. Unlike the Audio 70, the band runs tight to the back of your neck, and the two speakers sit very close on your ears. The one problem with the design is that the cable is far

too short, and as with the Creative, the microphone jack is no more than eight inches from the headphones jack. If the remote control for your speakers has a provision for phones but not a microphone, you'll require an extender.



PCZONE VERDICT 88



VP201S

LCD MONITOR



■ Price: £799 | Manufacturer: ViewSonic | Phone: 01293 643900 | www.viewsonic.co.uk

Bigger, smoother, faster. That's good, by the way...

TEN ISSUES ago my sensory receptors fell in love with the LG Flatron L2010P (issue 135, 80%). The VP201s is the same screen but in ViewSonic livery and with £300 amputated from its price tag.

You see, although there are dozens of flat panels on the market these days, their core components are produced by a mere handful of manufacturers – what's inside the big VP can also be found lighting up the L2010P, Philips 200P4, iiyama ProLite E511S, Dell UltraSharp 2001FP and NEC-Mitsubishi LCD2080UX. Even our Editor's Choice panel, the Hitachi CML174SXW, has a doppelgänger in the shape of the NEC-Mitsubishi LCD1760.

As with the smaller and slower VG910s (issue 142, 76%), the VP201s boasts a screen which pivots clockwise, switching your desktop from landscape to portrait (software is provided to properly manage its behaviour). Cranking the top round is great, like Linda Blair's owl impression in *The Exorcist*,

“Cranking the top round is great, like Linda Blair's owl impression in *The Exorcist*”

but while it's a nifty trick, it's of little concern to gamers.

What counts is speed and value against rivals, and here the VP201s doesn't do badly at all. It's cheaper than the LG and NEC-Mitsubishi, is in the same ballpark as the Dell and Philips, and is round about £90 more expensive than the iiyama. However, note that neither the Philips nor the iiyama provide an integrated USB 2.0 hub, and neither has the detachable, flexible base which provides such a useful range of tilt, swivel and height adjustments. Additionally, the super-slim

SPECIFICATIONS

SCREEN SIZE	20.1 inches
RESOLUTION	1600x1200
RESPONSE	16ms
CONTRAST	400:1
BRIGHTNESS	250cd/sq.m.
VIEW ANGLE	H176, V176
WEIGHT	8.5Kg
CONNECTIONS	D-Sub, DVI, USB 2.0 hub

ViewSonic knocks them for six on looks.

TWIST AND SHOUT

All these screens may have different ergonomics, but they share a common specification. The gamer-friendly 16ms response time means there's little afterglow in shooters, and DVD buffs will be glad to hear that action films on the VP201s are both sharp and vibrant. I've seen people make disparaging remarks about the screen, criticising it for jerkiness in games and off-kilter greyscales, but I can report that FPS performance is nothing short of fabulous and that anyone nitpicking the image quality must have been running at 800x600. At this size, the interpolation (image scaling) is unexpectedly

poor, and anyone with a graphics card not able to handle games above this resolution would be advised to stick with our Hitachi award-winner screen or even with CRT. Games work best at an LCD screen's native resolution, so if you've got a GeForce 6800 Ultra or Radeon X800 XT capable of running everything at 1600x1200 with all the detail turned on, you'll be able to enjoy a window-like picture quality.

FLAT TESTED

The big ViewSonic is built around Super In-Plane Switching (S-IPS) technology, one of three competing methods for driving LCD screens. S-IPS was developed by NEC and Hitachi to combat the problems inherent in the TN+Film process as seen

in the CML174SXW. TN+Film is known for a relatively tight viewing angle, meaning the image appears to 'blank out' if you're not looking directly at it, and also for displaying dead pixels in rainbow colours, which can be distracting. In S-IPS, the viewing angle is larger, meaning you don't need to be face-on to see the image properly, and dead pixels aren't red, green or blue but jet black, making them much less obvious. The VP201s tested here had no dead pixels at all – not bad going considering there's 1.92 million of them.

The ViewSonic is available in two flavours, the silver-framed VP201s you see here and the black-framed VP201b you don't. While the latter is marginally cheaper, if you're going to hook it up to a black computer with a black keyboard, black speakers, black mouse and black mouse mat, you'll find it all looks a bit drab and joyless. Aside from poor interpolation at low resolutions, that's about all that's wrong with it. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Appearance, slim bezel
- ✓ Quality product, no dead pixels
- ✓ Gamer-friendly response time
- ✗ Poor interpolation at low resolutions

90

How deep is your pocket?

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DEAR WANDY

Once again it's time for your monthly dose of Wandy's patented Medicinal Compound, refreshing the peripherals other magazines can't reach

■ DOCTOR IN THE NOOSE Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

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WEARING TROJAN

Q Some weeks back, my system was infected with a trojan called DOWNLOADER. I'm sure you know about this virus and that it's more of a nuisance than a real bastard. Anyway, I found the culprit file and healed it with my AVG anti-virus software. (I even had to delete the executable for Windows Media Player as it likes to hide there and reappear after you've healed it.)

Everything seems fine now, but when I leave my system idle for 20 minutes or so, a virus alert appears telling me that a trojan, DOWNLOADER.VB.EC, has been located in the C:\System Volume Information\Restore folder, and that I should run AVG to heal it. The only problem is, even when I run the virus scanner, no virus is found. I can't even find that folder on my drive.

Can you help? My system seems OK and it doesn't appear to be doing anything else

strange apart from throwing that message up. All drivers are up to date, along with virus database.

A The trojan you've unwittingly invited in consists of two files, PUP.EXE and OVER.EXE, both of which will turn up in more than one place on your hard drive. The reason you keep seeing them reappearing is threefold.

First, this particular trojan has an affinity with Windows Media Player, meaning your system starts acting strange each time you run it directly or click on a media link in a Web page. Second, the trojan slots a few entries into your registry to ensure it gets run each time your machine starts up. Finally, your System Restore file is contaminated.

Most users are unaware that XP takes snapshots of their system in the background, and each time key Windows applications are damaged or go walkabout – such as when you deleted Media Player – the programs are copied back from the System Restore file. This file lives in the System Volume Information folder (which you can't browse to by default because it's hidden, read-only and protected), and



If you've set your computer thinking that it's on holiday in some foreign land, it could cause problems.

if it includes a virus or trojan, not only will you be unable to repair it, but the infection will be passed back to the operating system.

In this situation, the first thing you need to do is identify the cause of the problem – a free anti-virus solution such as AVG is a good start, but you must think about a paid-up version with scan scheduling and technical support. Once you've determined the infected file (in this case, PUP.EXE and OVER.EXE), right-click on your taskbar and select Task Manager. Select the Processes tab, highlight the PUP.EXE and OVER.EXE entries, and then click the End Process button in the lower right corner.

Now we've stopped them running, it's time to remove them from the disk. Click the Start button, then Run, and type 'regedit' to open the Registry Editor. Drill down through HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE, Software, Microsoft, Windows, CurrentVersion, to the Run key and look for the two programs in the list of values on the right. Highlight and delete them. You can now browse to and delete the files identified by your anti-virus program, then finally

empty your Recycle Bin.

The final step is to get shot of the infection in your System Restore file. Double-click the System in your Control Panel, select the System Restore tab, then put a check in the box. This instantly deletes the files in the System Volume Information sub-folders and you can then run your anti-virus scan.

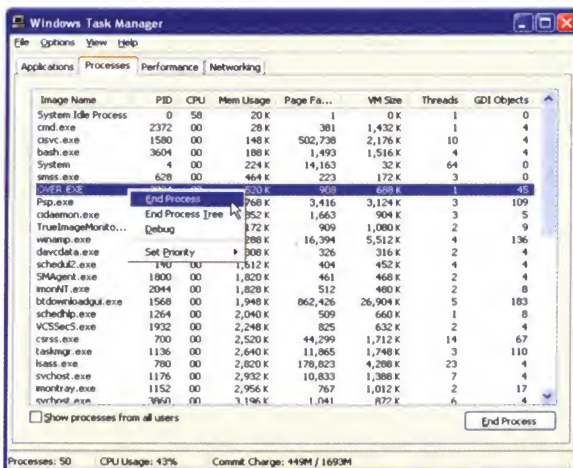
Don't forget to turn System Restore back on afterwards by unchecking that box, and for the record, never, ever, remove Windows components yourself; that's what the option in the left margin of the Add/Remove control panel is there for.

STOP THIEF

Q My problems started when I uninstalled a game on my Dell. The game I'd been playing was *Thief 2*, and I wanted to get shot of it because I'd somehow managed to corrupt it with too many fan maps. Once it was gone and I went to re-install it, the disk whirled once – and that was that. I removed the disk and restarted, and got an error message saying, 'Setup was unable to find languages SETUP.LID'.

So I went through all the usual things: Norton Anti-Virus

"Never, ever remove Windows components yourself: that's what the option in the Add/Remove control panel is for"



Use Windows Task Manager to stop trojans running before attempting to repair or delete them.

"I paid nearly £2,000 for this PC and £1,000 for my daughter's Dimension and what have I got? No technical support!"

(no viruses), Scandisk (no errors) and so on. I checked all my drivers were up to date and except for the LG Electronics CD-ROM and the NEC DVD they were – Dell told me that the drivers for these are "generic" and included on the operating disk, which I find hard to believe.

Another error occurs when I shut down after using any of the removable drives: I get the Windows Task Manager box popping up telling me it's waiting for 'rundll32.exe', with an option to end the process early. Dell's technical support people say I must phone its pay software line for assistance and that starts at £17. I paid near enough £2,000 for this PC and at the same time spent close to £1,000 for a Dimension for my daughter. And what have I got? No technical support!

Duncan Ardley

A The first thing I'd do is check that you're running your copy of Windows in the correct language. Open the Regional Options control panel and ensure that English is showing at the top, and that United Kingdom is in the box at the bottom. Although I've not bumped into this particular error myself, it's plausible that the installer may be having troubles with its language library if your machine has been configured to think it's holidaying abroad.

The next thing to try is to make sure that your temporary

folder is empty and that you have sufficient space on your hard drive. To find out where your machine is dumping all its crap, right-click on the My Computer icon and choose Properties (or open the System control panel), then select the Advanced tab and click the Environment Variables button at the bottom. The temporary folder is where Installers extract their stuff, and although it's unlikely, you may have remnants of your previous install still there.

If you're still having grief, it's most likely that either your game CD or the CD drive is at fault – can you install any other software? Can you copy files from the CD to a folder on your hard drive? If the unit still reads and writes data from other discs, I'd contact Eidos and arrange for a new game to be mailed to you. If the unit appears dead, it's unlikely to be a software problem – what Dell told you was correct. Try installing the game from the DVD instead and failing that, replace the drive.

A word of warning, though. I recently paid a little more for a Sony CD drive – the Sony hardware may be a couple of quid out front, but it has a very nice drawer action and is quieter – only to find it dead on arrival, making it two on the trot. Margins on what I like to call 'humdrum peripherals' are so low these days that quality seems to be slipping.

YOU DIRTY PUNK

Q I'm having problems with *Call Of Duty* multiplayer. PunkBuster keeps kicking me from online games with the error, 'Inadequate O/S Privileges'. I've been onto the PunkBuster support site, which pointed me in the direction of the Administrative Tools and making changes to my computer's local security policy. I looked there, but couldn't find anything. Any fixes? And where can I find the local security policy settings?

Luca

A The inadequate privileges error has been a recent hot topic on PunkBuster, and has prevented a lot of *Call Of Duty* and *America's Army* players getting their game fix. The problem originates in PunkBuster's requirement that it be run without any security restrictions.

In simple terms, if you're running 2000 or XP and are not logged in as a user with full administrator privileges, any PunkBuster-enabled game throws a wobbly. If you're using XP Home, visit the User Accounts control panel and change your user's rights from 'Limited' to 'Administrator'.

If you're running 2000 or XP Home, you need to open the Administrative Tools control panel, open the Computer Management sub-panel, and then open the Local Users and Groups branch of the System Tools tree. In there, you'll see all your users listed out – right-

PHILLY WHIZZ

SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

Q I recently purchased *Far Cry* and with my system specs – AMD Athlon 3200+, XFX GeForce FX 5900XT, 512MB RAM and wads of space on my hard drive – I expected to be able to run it at a high level. Not the case. It seems to struggle even at a medium setting. I'd have thought the hardware would've been able to run it on something better than low! Is my system that bad, or is it just that this game is so demanding?

Steven Butler

A Ideally, you need 1GB RAM and one of the high-end older cards – GeForce FX 5950 Ultra or Radeon 9800 XT – in order to run the game on maximum setting. Even then, it's prone to chugging in high detail locations. As a first step, try upping your RAM (a 512MB stick can be yours for around £50) and then lowering the resolution. You don't say what pixel size you're running it at, but anything above 1280x1024 is going to kill any PC that isn't propped up by a new 6800 or X800 card.

Q I've just ordered a new PC with an MSI MS-6741 motherboard, Athlon 64 3200+, Radeon 9800 SE A1W 128MB, 1GB of PC2700 RAM and a copy of Windows XP Home. I always have an eye towards future upgrades and so was wondering, what should I do first in a few months time, the RAM or the video card? I know you said in last month's *ZONE* that PC2700 was "relatively slow" and that a "PC only works at the speed of the slowest cog". Does this mean I should get faster RAM before I fork out for a beefier graphics card?

Graeme Restorick

A You'd do best to either softmod your All-In-Wonder – that's if you haven't done so already, of course – or better still, upgrade to one of the new GeForce 6800 Ultra or Radeon X800 XT video cards. That's where you'll notice the biggest difference. Although 64-bit AMD chips currently support memory up to PC3200, you need to check www.amd.com if and when you decide to replace your PC2700. If you fancy your hand at tweaking clock settings in the BIOS, you need to get the best RAM you can afford.

Q I have a severe case of motherboard confusion and an AU\$3,000 budget for construction. I'm looking at a P4 3.2GHz (or AMD equivalent), 1GB PC3200 RAM, 80-120GB 7200rpm HDD, DVD burner and DVD-ROM. Could you please suggest a motherboard that would suit my desires for 8xAGP and SATA? Would you recommend Intel or Athlon for gaming? Do you think SATA should be a priority for my gaming needs?

Daffy Duck

A As far as us Poms are aware, AU\$3K amounts to about £1,100. For that money, I'd opt for the ASUS K8V Deluxe (£85) with an AMD Athlon 64 3400 (£300), and select 1GB RAM from the validated memory modules listed on the K8V section of the ASUS website (approx £250). I'd then go for two of the 10,000rpm 74GB Western Raptor drives (£300) for the RAID controller on the motherboard. I'm a fan of Pioneer drives, so would opt for the DVR-A07 burner (£70) and any DVD-ROM for under £20. Total: £1,025.

click on your user, select Properties, and then select the 'Member Of' tab. If the Administrators group isn't shown here, add it by clicking the Add button at the bottom of the screen, typing the word 'Administrators' into the text area and clicking OK. Work your way back to the desktop, logoff and then log back in.

Beware that if your machine is infected with certain spyware, trojans or

viruses, there's an increased likelihood that this fix will not work – the VX2.BetterInternet malware (malicious spyware) resets your permissions back after you've changed them. Make sure you're using the very latest version of LavaSoft's Ad-aware or Spybot-S&D from www.safer-networking.org. [X2]

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com

Call Of Duty



Oopsiedaisy: Inadequate NOS catamounts in the gustatory modality

Your computer has encountered something bad. It's probably your fault.

If you'd like to see a few more meaningless error messages providing no clue as to what just happened, thus preventing you from addressing the problem yourself and forcing you to visit the developer's web site instead, where you will have to register for a support forum full of grammar-oblivious teenagers with three brain cells and a predilection for the word 'fag' as a result of their unresolved sexualities, press OK.

OK Not OK

If only all error messages were this helpful.



WATCHDOG

Axe the angst! Halt the hate! Getting grief from a company? Don't just sit there stewing – write to us. We've got two strong arms, we can help...

■ **HE'S YOUR FRIEND** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please let us know your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

HARD DRIVE HELL

It's bad enough when your hard drive fails. It's even worse when you haven't backed up your data. And it's armageddon when you realise that said knackered hard drive's warranty has just expired. Talk about rubbing salt into those fresh wounds, as reader Richard Hatch found out when his IBM hard drive failed.

"I know it sounds like a common joke, but it does sometimes happen. After spending a few days trying to retrieve my data, I gave up and emailed IBM, who told me to contact HGST (Hitachi Global Storage Technologies – IBM's business partner in the hard drive market), saying that there shouldn't be any problems getting the drive replaced since the two-year warranty had only just expired."

Understandably, HGST said it wanted proof of purchase before it'd consider offering a replacement, but because Richard had recently moved house, he had no idea where it was. "I then spent several weeks being bounced back and forth between IBM and HGST. I'll never be buying an IBM drive again, and I suggest that no-one else does either. Its customer support sucks almost as much as its hardware."

Harsh words indeed, and ones which we sent off to IBM to get its take on the situation: "We're sorry Mr Hatch is unsatisfied with IBM's hardware and customer service on this occasion," said a spokesperson. "As Mr Hatch has identified, the drive is certainly out of warranty and any repair to the unit is therefore chargeable to the customer."

It pointed out that Richard couldn't even remember the name of the outlet he bought the drive from, which makes it impossible for IBM "to formally define the terms and conditions of sale. It's vital that customers retain proof of purchase in order to secure rights of warranty".



Arriving at the rubbish tip, reader Richard Hatch didn't fancy his chances of finding that bloody receipt...

That said though, IBM does admit that its initial response to your issues "was not explicit" and say, as a result, you've spent a good deal of time chasing down both IBM's and HGST customer support departments. "Because of this and as an exceptional act of goodwill, IBM has therefore issued Mr Hatch with a replacement hard drive," says IBM. Nice one.

MIGRAINE INCLUDED

Well, his new graphics card was supposed to be kick-ass. Reader Ricky Miller had bought the Radeon 9200se 128MB card from The Computer Shop in Lakeside for £39.99 to replace his GeForce 3. Alas, when he got home and compared the benchmarks, his old card was in fact twice as quick. Oops.

"I took the card back and asked for a refund as the card wasn't what I expected," recalls Ricky. "The manager told me I wasn't entitled to a refund but could exchange it for a different item – trouble was that the store didn't have a large inventory."

So Ricky then asked for credit note so he could go to another branch nearby which had more stock to choose from – specifically a 80GB hard drive he wanted. "Can't do that," came the reply, so Ricky then phoned the company's customer service department, which didn't help

either. He tried on a couple of other occasions to sort out the matter, but with no success.

Finally, he re-contacted the company's customer services two weeks later and spoke to someone else who then told him that they could offer a refund.

Over to The Computer Shop, who says that, Christmas aside, it doesn't operate an unwanted gifts policy, but an exchange policy instead. It does say that stores can transfer stock between each other or from its head office – something perhaps The Computer Shop in Lakeside should bear in mind. As for the credit note, it does in fact offer one – but it has to be issued from the company's head office. Clear as mud, then.

A HUGE TINY PROBLEM PC sellers, beware if you should happen to end up with reader Keith Hale on the

phone to you. He saw a Tiny advert advertising one of its Athlon-based towers with no extras – not even a keyboard. Upon calling, he was told he'd need a £49.99 cable-set to get the machine running. "Other than for power, what are these cables?" asked Keith, only for the operator to admit that it included a printer cable which he didn't even need.

Then Tiny tried to sell him a Windows XP package for £149.99, but Keith pointed out that he already had his own copy which he could load up: "No you can't sir, Tiny computers prevent you from doing this."

"Even if I format the hard disk and install my own copy?" asked Keith. "Yes sir, you cannot format Tiny hard drives." (Stop laughing at the back Wendy! – Ed.)

To cut a long story short, Keith ended up making an order for exactly what he wanted, not what Tiny wanted to sell him – but then it managed to cock up his credit application. "Tiny said there was a problem with my credit card, which meant it couldn't process my order but it still took the payment from the credit card with the problem..."

Keith is furious with Tiny for what he sees as underhand selling techniques and for potentially getting him a black mark on his credit history.

Over to Tiny: "We're disappointed to hear about Mr Hale's experience and



You might need some headache pills if you phone Tiny too...

THE ACCUSED

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT



Tiny: everything and the kitchen sink. Even if you don't want it.

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ WATCHDOG PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE COMPANIES WHO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO MAKE THEIR PUNTERS HAPPY...

Not one but two companies up for praise this month: first up is Microsoft. Reader Chris Hill purchased a Microsoft five-button Intellimouse over two years ago. However, said mouse recently went kaput. While Chris thought he'd have to shell out for a brand new one, he had a quick read of his deceased rodent's warranty and was delighted to find that the Microsoft mouse came with a five-year guarantee. When he called Microsoft though, Chris was fully expecting the company to tell him to 'walk the plank' because he no longer had his receipt.



Microsoft's Intellimouse - comes with a rock solid warranty.

"Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather," reports a delighted Chris. "After only a few minutes, I was talking to a person from customer services and I explained my situation - within less than five minutes, I was assured that a new mouse would be sent out within seven working days."

And on the seventh day, his replacement mouse did indeed arrive, leaving Chris understandably impressed: "I'd just like to thank all at Microsoft for their help and understanding, and for furnishing me with a new mouse - all without a receipt. I don't believe that many other companies would've done that."

Next up on the list for a commendation is... PC World! Yes, the villain of many a Watchdog piece has impressed reader Francis Lambourne, who's thrown a very positive light on the company's after-sales care. He used said service after his PC suffered a major OS crash which stopped it from starting up completely.

Francis finally got through to a bod at PC World's customer service department, who did his best to help him out. Alas, nothing seemed to work, so PC World recommended that he do a complete system restore: "Unfortunately, I'd lost the restore discs that came with my computer," recalls Francis. "I explained this to the guy and he took down my details, saying a new pair of discs would be sent to me. Four days later, they dropped through my letterbox - and 30 minutes after that everything was going again." Now that's service.

"We're sorry to hear of Mr Hale's experience - the adviser does seem to have been a little overzealous"

TINY PRACTISES THE ART OF UNDERSTATEMENT

would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused. The adviser on this occasion does seem to have been a little overzealous. It's certainly not in our interest to misinform customers or take incomplete payment details."

While Tiny says its staff are fully trained and monitored, "it

appears that Mr Hale did receive an unsatisfactory level of service from our sales advisers". As a gesture of goodwill, it's offering you £50 off its products. Finally, Tiny points out that your credit record will not be affected by a failed credit check caused by incomplete information. [22]

IN THE DOG HOUSE

THERE ARE SOME COMPANIES WHO APPEAR TO BAULK AT THE IDEA OF RESPONDING TO OUR QUERIES. IF THEY DON'T WANT TO PLAY BALL, HERE'S WHERE WE PUT THEM

GAMES FUSION

THE COMPLAINT - Reader David Stocker won a competition at Games Fusion that was supposed to glean him a free pair of Plantronic DSP-500 headphones. According to David, it's been weeks since he won the compo and he's yet to receive his prize: "I've spoken to Games Fusion and it says it's Plantronic's fault, as it's meant to be sending out the headphones and not Games Fusion."

THE PURSUIT - Two emails dispatched by Watchdog to Games Fusion which have yet to glean a response...

THE VERDICT - Here's hoping that Games Fusion sees this and perhaps gets round to dropping us a line, even if it's just to tell us that David has now received the headphones that it promised him as a prize...



ON THE
CD/DVD



GameShadow®

...just play!

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- Updates your Video Drivers
- Delivers the latest demos, mods & movies
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from PCZone
says...

"GameShadow is like an all knowing Butler. If you buy as little as four or five games a year, or if you just want to be kept abreast of driver developments, and what they mean to your PC, GameShadow makes a lot of sense..."

check out the cover disc or sign up for a FREE trial at:

www.gameshadow.com

in association with



BUYER'S GUIDE

Same old same old? Why not brighten up your life with some new gear – you know it makes sense...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

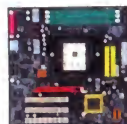
MOTHERBOARDS



IC7

STREET PRICE £82.50
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

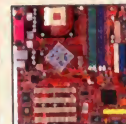
Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN onboard. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.



K8N NEO PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

With AMD's 800MHz HyperTransport bus at its core, the K8N Neo Platinum is ideal for Athlon owners wanting to find a solid home for their 64-bit chips. As with many rivals, the MSI mobo features dynamic overclocking, but on this particular nForce2 250 board it actually seems to work, delivering 10-15 per cent additional thrust without you having to raise a finger. The downside is that it lacks SoundStorm 7.1 support.

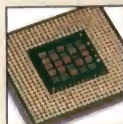


875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £105
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent.

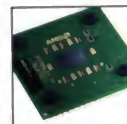
PROCESSORS



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £183
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now well below £200, it makes sense to spend a bit extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB

STREET PRICE £135
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium – but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.



P4 2.6GHZ

STREET PRICE £116
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

We'd previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.6GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.

HDDS



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £62
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

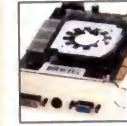
GRAPHICS CARD



RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB

STREET PRICE £153
MANUFACTURER Sapphire Technology
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com

Bit of a no-brainer this one. In what amounts to an AGP swansong, the 128MB version of ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro can now be yours for just £150: high-end punch in a mainstream price bracket. Like the 5900 XT, it's a product from the higher echelons, remarketed to appeal to a wider audience. Unlike the GeForce, it's not been throttled: it's the real deal. Buy one now.



GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB

STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER NVIDIA
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.nvidia.co.uk

The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far out front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want the card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.



RADEON 9800XT 256MB

STREET PRICE £309
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we gave some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid rattling around in your back pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for Half-Life 2, redeemable when the game finally gets released.

SOUNDCARDS



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £85
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £167
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA ever...



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500

STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button and two thumb buttons that speed up Web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

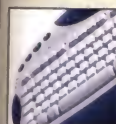


MX700

STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



INTERNET KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICKS



INSPIRE P580 5.1

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. This latest design includes a headphone jack at last too.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



FLATRON L1710B

STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel has finally triumphed and knocked our favourite Hitachi from the top spot, largely due to its price tumbling over £50 recently. The LG boasts superb picture quality and is a speedy little number to boot, making it ideal for gaming. If you're currently weighed down with a monster on your desktop and yearn for a new, slimmer model (don't we all?), then this is the way to go. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



CML1745SX

STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML1745SX has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg and comes in colours that match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is a solid choice.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £410
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and so ideal for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD 40GB

STREET PRICE £400
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod – and the new version is even smaller (in size), yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch too. The speedy Firewire interface (you need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

STREET PRICE £316
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO 128MB

STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers) and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYERS

FX5900XT



MSI
MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL
www.msicomputer.co.uk



MAILBOX

He's waiting patiently for your letters. Don't let him down...

■ SITTING COMFORTABLY Dave Woods



LIFE SENTENCE

I've been reading games mags for over 20 years, from the early days of *Crash* and *Your Spectrum*, through *Ace*, *The One* and finally to *PC ZONE*. Everyone makes attachments to mags and it's always a wrench to leave one and start another, but this usually happens because the machine it supports has reached its end. With the PC having an arguably infinite life span, does this mean we'll never have to end our relationship?

David Marsden

We're honoured to be mentioned in the same breath

as these classics mags, now sadly deceased. But yes, we're here for life, not just for Christmas.

OUTSIDE. NOW!

I'd like to extend an invitation to Steve Hill to share his views on rugby (the game played in heaven BTW), rugby players and supporters with me and all the other "homoeerotically charged toffs" at my local rugby club. So long as he hasn't been thrown into jail during this summer's Euro 2004 tournament along with the other oinkball supporting chavs, that is.

Tim Collins



You put your right arm in, your right arm out...

Steve's very flattered by your offer but would just like to

point out that, despite this month's *NeverQuest* (p101), he's just not that way inclined.

HERO'S MIGHTY VOICE

On entering the dimly lit cavern with the symbols of HMV inscribed on the gate, our intrepid hero searched around his new setting by the light of his torch for the legendary *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. After minutes of desperate searching, the item was discovered, in a dark, foreboding corner. Our hero was outraged: "Surely this should be a worshipful site in full view of all those who enter! Did I not just see 'CSI: Crime Scene Investigation' occupying a sacred place?"

Thus, our fearless hero took it upon himself to remove every trace of the title which dared be thought worthy of viewing by those of the human species. In its place he put *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, which would bring joy to the hearts of all those who looked upon it. Thus, knowing that order was restored, evil was vanquished and the innocent villagers were saved, our hero retreated back to the outer world.

The Hero
Jonathan Hasson

CONCRETE JUNGLE

I've been a subscriber to your mag for the last year and have enjoyed the magazine throughout this time. One thing however, that I'm becoming increasingly infuriated with is your constant bashing of Milton Keynes. In issue 43, Martin Korda used the following caption in his review of *Ground Control II*: 'Your planet resembles Milton Keynes. Only slightly nicer.' I've lived in Milton Keynes for 15 years and am fed up with this constant degradation. Come on Korda. You, me and the concrete cows.

Patrick Miller

And we thought you'd have been more fed up with living in Milton Keynes for 15 years...

ATM

The E3 report brought home to me just how much the games industry needs to grow up. The images portrayed women who'd been paid to wear not a lot and pretend to enjoy being handled by sweaty punters all day. The glassy smiles hid the 'get this



No more till next E3. Unless you complain some more...

creep away from me' thoughts.

It's sad, and we need to stop perpetuating the view of women as simply sexual objects. I was disappointed to see the photos in *PC ZONE* and with the tone of the report in general. It may not put women off computer games or the industry in general, but it does add to that 'only leering lads enjoy this stuff' feeling.

Gavin Hay

We go to E3 every year and we report the show back to you as we see it. The question is, would you like to hear it how it is, or receive a sanitised 'we know that was there but we're going to choose to ignore it' type of feature?

SAY WHAT?

I'm a keen games player and have been since my early years. The advance in graphics is clear for everyone to see, but it's with increasing annoyance that I read about the advances in sound. What exactly am I complaining about?

Well, I come from a predominantly deaf family and my big gripe is the lack of subtitles in big games. *Max Payne 2* is a brilliant example of how subtitles can be used to develop the story (and even for comedic effect when you're protecting Baseball Batboy). Most other games are useless - I can never understand the story, even when it comes down to cut-scenes in shooters like *Painkiller*.

I'm not saying developers are doing a bad job, just that in certain cases, a little bit of extra thought would make games so much more enjoyable for those of us who're more visually aware than reliant on sound.

Jon Reeves

We couldn't agree more. It wouldn't take much more effort to subtitle games and it would make a huge difference to the hard-of-hearing. Check out www.deafgamers.com for reviews of games from a deaf person's perspective.

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 9 DALLINGTON ST, LONDON EC1V 0BQ, OR EMAIL MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?

WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD



"It's legal for me to smoke, fly a plane and have sex, but I can't buy *Manhunt*"

LEWIS FORBES,
SWEET 16

SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE

I turned 16 in February. I'm now legal for me to smoke cigarettes, fly a plane, meet a girl, have sex with her, marry her and have children, but I can't go into a games shop and buy what I want. I tried to buy *Manhunt* the other day, and was refused – why do games have such high age certificates?

I kind of understand with films as they're more realistic, but games? I think they should put on some sort of parental guidance sticker and let us buy what we want.

Lewis Forbes

Unfortunately, we're with the BBFC on this one. Proper certification means that adult games, like *Manhunt*, aren't played by children. The upshot is more adult content all-round and less hysteria from the tabloids. And that's got to be a good thing.



Is it a bird?
Is it a plane?
Course not.

allow for negligible monthly costs.

MMOAN

One thing that really annoys me is the monthly pricing of MMORPGs. I recently splashed out £30 for *Star Wars: Galaxies*, and then realised I'd have to pay almost double the cost of the game to stay online for a year!

Fair enough, I know servers must be paid for and companies have to guzzle cash, but I have an alternative: why not introduce ads into MMORPGs? If games companies wanted it, virtual merchandise could even be distributed online. If this new source of income could be exploited properly, then we may be able to have fun for free.

Jordan Pearson

This actually does happen in certain games. Virtual world titles such as *There* and *Second Life* all feature branded goods that form the basis of player economies and

However, you'll never be able to fully cover the ongoing overheads that MMOG developers face – it's not just maintaining servers, but also staff wages for the workers who continue to tend to a game post-launch. If you're worried about cash, you can always buy and sell your favourite high-level characters on eBay. Not that we'd ever officially sanction such practices of course. (But if anyone wants a lvl 43 EQ wizard, send an email to...)

LUDDITE

I fear for the future of games. There's something wholeheartedly warming about sitting down at my PC and automatically resting my fingers on the WASD keys. I don't want a virtual reality suit that takes half an hour to put on, then once you're inside it, you need a piss, so you have to get out again. I like games just the way they are, and think they're brilliant without lifelike graphics. Graphics are never going to be as realistic as real life, but now it seems they're getting very close to it. Once they get there, where's the whole industry going to go next?

Capt Poddy

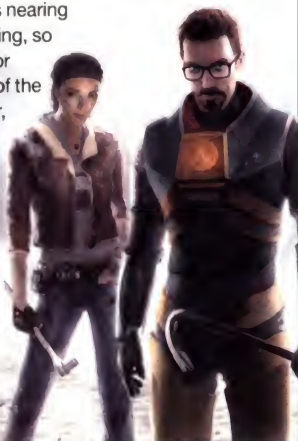
The beauty about progress is that it gives you a choice. If you like games the way they are now, then you can work your way through the budget section, spending a fiver on every classic ever released. If you want to play the future, you can look at the new releases and slaver over the likes of *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*.

HILL'S MUM

I'm writing to say how much I enjoy Steve Hill's 'NeverQuest'. I'm not even online yet, but Steve's encounters on the Net make me laugh every month. Thanks for employing him.

Peter Lukey

We've asked Steve's mum to stop writing to us – this is plainly her latest disguise. [X]



GAMES = GOOD

My dad's suffering from advanced prostate cancer, and lately has been getting into PC games. I gave him my copy of *Half-Life*, which he's taken a real shine to. As he's new to this gaming lark, I decided to sit with him – only to find myself captivated by Gordon Freeman all over again. Needless to say, that initial sitting has become a regular occurrence and we now sit together while I watch my 64-year-old dad blast those aliens back to Xen!

This may sound sad, but we're sharing an experience, talking tactics, having a barrel of laughs and it makes him forget about his illness. We've always been close, but this shared pleasure has given me comic memories that I'll never forget. My dad enjoys saving the world so much and is nearing completion of Gordon's first outing, so I've decided to buy *Half-Life 2* for him. Whether we'll see the end of the game together is another matter, but one thing's for sure: I was always certain my dad was a hero and during those hours he spends as Gordon, he feels he has the strength to conquer any adversary.

Wayne Blackhurst

And if you're going to get *Half-Life 2*, how about a new graphics card to play it on?

Half-Life: we always knew it was a life-changing game.

BACKCHAT



▲ ANGRY? UPSET? THOROUGHLY MISERABLE? OR FULL OF THE JOYS OF LIFE? LOG ONTO WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK AND LET US KNOW...

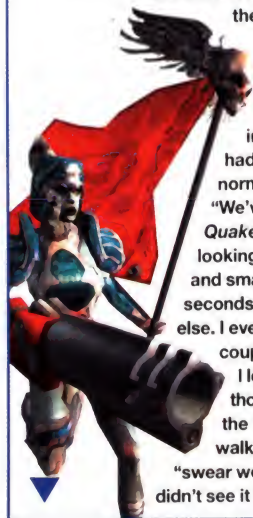
Games are fun. That's the theory, and for the most part it holds true. Unfortunately, they're also the cause of 96.7 per cent of the nation's arguments/peripheral breakages. *WildPods* is with Backchat on this. "I've had many tantrums over a particularly hard level or an end boss being stupidly hard... What was your torment and what piece of equipment did you break?"

Escaped_monkey didn't know where to start. "One time, I accidentally deleted my *Deus Ex* saved games, so I picked up a chair (a spinny-round office chair) and hurled it at the wall, leaving a gaping hole which took an entire tub of polyfiller to fix. A certain mission in *Vice City* drove me to punch another wall, which left a surprisingly large crack. *Far Cry* regularly makes me whack my keyboard too, and now the left control key is a bit dodgy."

You're not all fighters, though. **Davidmc555** is a lover: "The only thing I break when I play games is hearts. (*Licks fingers, rubs eyebrows.*)" Luckily, our own **Suzy_PCZ** was on hand to keep the fists flying. "I smashed my keyboard playing *EverQuest*. It'd just crashed for about the 10th time, lost me another lot of experience and dumped me in some foreign land. My mum actually told me that she was becoming quite concerned for my mental health!" Something Backchat can sympathise with.

Our sympathies also go out to **Jeren**: "I once threw a game CD behind me when the game was pissing me off, and it bounced off a wall and hit me in the back of the head. I didn't know whether to laugh or scream with rage... So I kinda went with a bizarre evil laugh that made my throat hurt."

And it seems that no-one is immune from the disease. **Dave_PCZ** had this to say about the ZONE office, normally a tranquil and spiritual setting. "We've broken loads of stuff, mainly in our *Quake 3* stage. One time, Korda starting looking round wildly, picked up his phone and smashed it to bits, which led to about 30 seconds of nervous silence from everyone else. I even played with a broken mouse for a couple of weeks so I'd have an excuse if I lost. The funniest temper tantrum though, has to be the time Korda shouted the 'c' word just as our then-female boss walked past." **Graham_123** thinks that "swear words rule". Unfortunately, our boss didn't see it the same way. Till next month...



TXTCHAT

LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE TALKING!

Just send the keyword 'PCZCHAT' to 83125, followed by your name and comments, quips or angry rants. Please be aware that messages sent to TxtChat cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

RIC BURNS: If I include £5 with this txt, will I get 'Letter of the Month' and a graphics card? I've been a subscriber since issue 36! Love u all!

MARTIN RICKS: Where's *Duke Nukem Forever*? Is it ever going to get released?

CHRIS WRAY: I think someone should make an unofficial *Sam & Max* game. That'd show LucasArts.

M FANELLI: Am I the only person in the world who doesn't care about *Sam & Max*?

PAUL NIEMAN: I'd like to vote for Jamie Sefton to be evicted from the PC ZONE house.

NEW!

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

FAR CRY



A huge leap for PC gaming, *Far Cry* is also an absolute joy to play. With its long-range combat, shimmering shores, impressive enemy AI and seamlessly integrated physics engine, it's the first shooter to show the potential of next-gen PC titles. The narrative may be slightly iffy, but the tension and exhilaration it instils in you makes the battle against the Trigen and their mercenary creators one of the best shooters in years.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



CALL OF DUTY

Call Of Duty is like the tour de force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear and excitement within you, there is no greater WWII experience.

PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward **PCZ** ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy **PCZ** ISSUE 136



MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault*'s set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.

PUB EA **DEV** 2015 **PCZ** ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

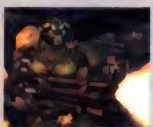
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith **PCZ** ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ** ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes **PCZ** ISSUE 138



UNREAL II

It takes a special game to beat the gorgeous visuals of *Unreal II*. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice-acting all exude quality too.

PUB Atari **DEV** Legend Entertainment **PCZ** ISSUE 126



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Také 2 **DEV** Illusion **PCZ** ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber 'em up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ** ISSUE 133

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games **PCZ** ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

NEW ENTRY The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way **PCZ** ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ** ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios **PCZ** ISSUE 132



WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus **PCZ** ISSUE 128



GROUND CONTROL II

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freemove missions – strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment **PCZ** ISSUE 143



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios **PCZ** ISSUE 135



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive and preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio **PCZ** ISSUE 108



HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Relic **PCZ** ISSUE 134

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, home to the greatest and most gorgeous games in the land. Updated each and every issue to ensure that these pages are fresher than a super-cool daisy, you can rest assured that the titles listed here aren't just any old tat – they're the leading contenders in their genre...

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

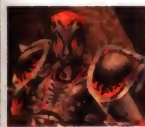
PUB: Activision DEV: Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay is anything but.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

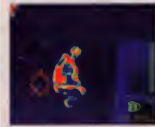
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

NEW ENTRY Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it, in our opinion.

PUB Atari DEV Perfect Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 79

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111

GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130

THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 135

SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios

PCZ ISSUE 136

CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121

SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79

MULTIPLAYER MODS

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)



What with *Counter-Strike* now available as a full game in the form of *Condition Zero*, *Desert Combat* sits atop the modding tree. A *Battlefield 1942* TC that focuses on the more sandy conflicts of the last decade (scraps like the original *Desert Storm* or the troubles in Somalia), *Desert Combat* is extraordinarily good, extremely popular and as watertight as the best commercial release. It also provides a great stepping-stone between the original game and the forthcoming Middle-Eastern *Battlefield 2*.

WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)

This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes it a sure-fire winner.

WEB www.natural-selection.org

INFILTRATION (UNREAL TOURNAMENT)

A top drawer realism-bound mod for the ageing *Unreal Tournament* warhorse, *Infiltration* takes the familiar terrorist vs counter-terrorist plot and gives it a spin with some amazing weapon loadouts and hugely tense gameplay.

WEB infiltration.sentrystudios.net

THE SPECIALISTS (HALF-LIFE)

Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics makes this a must-play mod. With a range of maps and *Matrix*-esque bullet trails, it provides a nice break from the über-realism of *Counter-Strike*.

WEB www.specialistsmod.net

SAS: INTO THE LION'S DEN (UT2003)

NEW ENTRY A slick and atmospheric good guys vs bad guys mod that oozes class and detail – it's one-shot kills all round, with stamina levels and getting out of puff to add to the realism. He who dares, frags.

WEB www.sas.jolt.co.uk

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of seven expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *PlanetSide* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131

EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130

ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114

A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis DEV eGenesis

PCZ ISSUE 133

◀ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real *Boy's Own*-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage DEV Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101

◀ SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04



A fresh season is added to the *CM4* canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 136

VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.

PUB EA Sports DEV Headgate Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135

◀ DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fourth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With an excellent damage model and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 140

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-addled speed freaks.

PUB EA DEV Black Box

PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, along with more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft DEV 1C: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128

MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

PUB Microsoft DEV Microsoft

PCZ ISSUE 133

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.

PUB Activision DEV Lucasarts

PCZ ISSUE 137

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Eagle Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 138

DISC PAGES



DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

POP BITCH

DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ The Internet. A revolutionary creation, enabling people across the globe to share life experiences, information and videos of their favourite celebs in uncompromising positions. (Abi Titmuss is the latest doing the rounds, or so the rest of the team tell me.) But this month, I've been rudely reminded of the negative sides of the Web. Having so far clocked up nearly five years of being online without so much of a sniff of a virus, Lady Luck finally decided to give me the finger, infecting my PC with a nasty case of the pop-ups. Every time I log on, I'm now assailed with ads for polyphonic ringtones and others involving practices I couldn't even begin to talk about here.

Still, it's worth it. Without the Internet (and the pop-ups), we wouldn't have online gaming as we know it – and this month's discs have been tinged with the distinct scent of multiplayer.

First off, we've got exclusive multiplayer demos of the sublime *Ground Control II* and the violent *Chaos League*. If you've got a DVD, then you can sample not just the one, not even two, but three whole MMOGs this month, including the sci-fi thrills of *Anarchy Online*.

However, if you prefer playing by yourself though, don't worry: check out the single-player demo of the new *Thief: Deadly Shadows* game or a spot of hack 'n' slash action with *Knights Of The Temple*. Enjoy!

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

CD1/DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: Massive Entertainment Reviewed: Issue 143, 84%

MULTIPLAYER

You had a chance to play the single-player side of *Ground Control II* in the July issue – now it's time to try your hand against some other warmongering RTS fans online with this exclusive multiplayer demo. With two tutorial missions to get you started and three online maps in which to wage war, you can play as the North Star Alliance or as the alien Viron forces. Each side features the entire range of their respective armies, and with up to eight people playing at any one time, the map can get pretty hectic with masses of men, tanks and airstrikes battling for their lives. Sadly, there's no LAN play – you'll have to host your own password-protected server instead.



The battles are lively and look quite spectacular.

CHAOS LEAGUE

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters Dev: Cyanide Studios Reviewed: Issue 145, 78%

MULTIPLAYER



Use your spells to devastating effect.



At least he hasn't got Urs Meier to contend with.

Euro 2004 has finished (hooray!), and what little I saw of it was anodyne in the extreme, thanks to some harsh refereeing and lack of sharpened studs. *Chaos League* is the antidote, a brutal take on

football (albeit the US-tinged version, complete with odd-shaped balls). It features teams of humans taking on dwarves, elves, the undead and even dog-like Praetorians. We like it, and now

you can like it too with the multiplayer demo, which gives you a chance to bust-a-move on real humans (via the virtual world of your PC), while bribing the ref, recruiting hooligans and doping players.

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant

information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

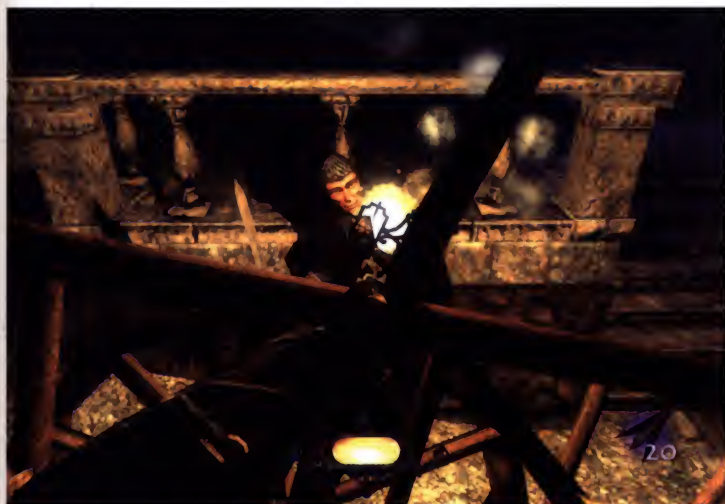
- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

CD1/DVD Pub: Eidos Dev: Ion Storm Reviewed: Issue 144, 85%



Just a little prick with a bow and arrow...

Master thief Garrett is back in his third instalment, and it's another excellent outing for the medieval pikey. Flaws notwithstanding, *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (or *Thief 3*) is a masterful game, packed with more suspense than the Golden Gate bridge. This single-player demo kicks off with a tutorial mission to snatch the purse of the dandy Lord Julian. It's pretty easy going, even if you've never



thieved anything on your PC before. Once you've mastered the finer intricacies of pilfering, you can make your way onto the first mission proper – stealing the Bloodline Opal from a certain Lord Ember. Just to make things a little more interesting, it's hidden in a vault in the basement of the Rutherford's mansion. You'll need all of your sneaky skills to get you in and out unnoticed.

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

CD2/DVD Pub: NovaLogic Dev: NovaLogic Reviewed: Issue 145, 83%

Joint Ops (as it's known to its mates) has pretty much stolen our lunchtimes lately. NovaLogic's attempt to out-*Battlefield* the *Battlefield* series appears to have paid off big time, with its 100-player games filling the Net with virtual soldier-boys across the world. This is the second public demo,

putting the Joint Ops and Indonesian Rebel forces against each other on the Dormant Volcano level. Boats and helicopters still play a vital part in forming a successful strategy, and with up to 100 players duking it out, you'll need to rely on squad tactics more than ever.



Right in the arse. Painful...



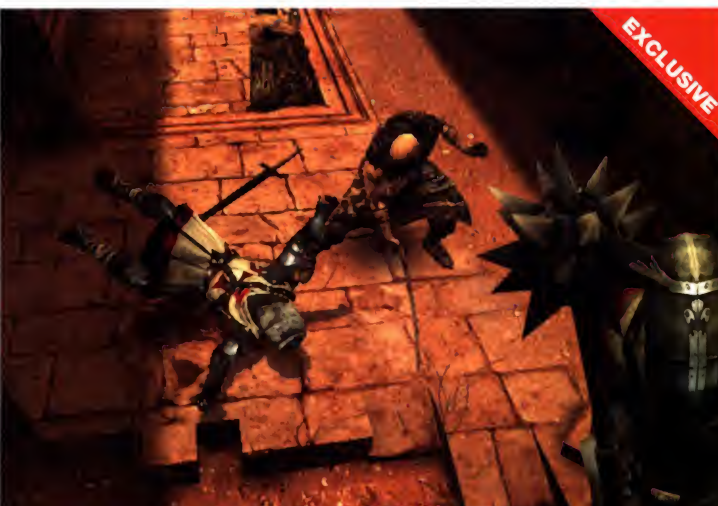
Looks like a spear to me.

KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE

CD2/DVD Pub: TDK Dev: Starbreeze Reviewed: Issue 142, 40%

If you fancy running rampant in the name of The Lord, *KotT* (as we like to call it) is a must-try. You are Paul, hero of the game, up against a horde of sword-wielding Saracens. Luckily, you're well prepared – from your magically deep pockets, you can choose between a sword, axe, mace

or bow and arrow to smite your enemies. Use the Q, W and E keys for weak but fast attacks, powerful but slow attacks and blocks respectively. Alternatively, hold down the TAB key at the same time for special attacks or use the space bar for your divine powers. Amen.



Another Sun reporter dressed as a crusader in Portugal.

RUNESCAPE

CD2/DVD

Pub: Jagex Dev: Jagex

Our first MMOG this month is the humble *RuneScape* from Jagex – and while no-one could expect it to stand alongside the behemoths that are *EverQuest II* or *Dark Age Of Camelot*, it's got one major bonus – it's entirely Web-based. This means you don't need extensive hardware or million-dollar PC set-ups to log on and enjoy the fantasy trappings, and you can play at work while your boss is looking the other way.

For this reason, and probably this reason alone, *RuneScape* is massively popular as well as massively multiplayer. At the last count, it boasted over 500,000 users – your future wife could well be in there somewhere. What's more, it recently underwent a major update, with improved graphics to add to the immersion. We've got the full Java download on our discs to save even more time getting started.

All the details on the game can be found at www.runescape.com – so why not sign yourself up (it's mostly free after all) and join the 500,000 others. You don't want to feel left out do you?



It's not a looker, but it's free!

PLUS: PATCHES FOR COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04 AND THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS, MOVIES OF PRINCE OF PERSIA 2, TWO BLACK & WHITE 2 CREATURE ANIMATIONS, FOUR NEW MOVIES OF THE FUTURE OF THE FPS PARTICIPANTS AND COMMUNITY CHEST (SEE PAGE 100)

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 123. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is double-sided. Flip it over and you'll find The Essential Selection, which gives you the nine best demos of the last year (including *Far Cry*, *Max Payne 2* and *Ground Control II*), the five mods of the month, plus an exhaustive library of patches, drivers, utilities and modding tools. Everything you need to make your mates dead jealous, in fact.

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

DVD Pub: FunCom **Dev:** FunCom **Reviewed:** Issue 134, 80%



Genetic experiments on unicorns? Tsk.



Another friendly Rubi-ka resident.

It's MMOG madness this month, with no less than three of the buggers trying to win your affections on the DVD. The main attraction is provided by the long-running sci-fi spectacular that is *Anarchy Online*. AO recently celebrated three years of activity, so to help spread the word and join the fun, we're offering an exclusive chance to try out the full game – complete with both *The Notum Wars* and *Shadowlands* expansion packs – with a free 30-day trial.

Yep, you've got one whole month to explore the alien world of Rubi-ka, experiencing the weird inhabitants, fighting the bizarre creatures and dosing yourself in nano-enhanced goodness. To get started, install the game from our disc, then pop over to www.anarchy-

online.com/PCZone to register for our exclusive trial.

Just saying 'Hello' to any passing warrior should be enough to help you get started. Make sure you play through the tutorials to get you jumping through the early levels, and if you're the exploring type, keep an eye out for the regular tour guides offered by high-ranking game masters.

If you want further pointers, we ran a 'Getting Started' guide back in issue 137, and don't forget to check out our fantastic competition on page 85 for a chance to win a Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card, some brilliant AO merchandise and even a luxury in-game apartment for impressing your friends. We truly are the magazine that keeps on giving.

UT2004 Community Bonus Pack Volume 2

The *Unreal* community has done it again – Volume 2 of the Community Bonus Pack for UT2004 sports 20 superb new maps, four new characters and two new mutators, making it an essential bolt-on for all UT fans.



WWII ONLINE

DVD Pub: Strategy First **Dev:** Cornered Rat Software
Reviewed: Issue 145, 77%

If sci-fi isn't your bag, maybe you'll feel more at home in the wacky world of *World War II Online*. Aiming to provide the total war experience, this recently updated classic has also been running for years and keeping thousands of players occupied (along with virtual France – ho ho).

We've got a full review and a 'Getting Started' guide (see pages 96 and 98) that tells you everything you need to know about surviving your time in the trenches.

To get fighting, just install the game then point your browser to www.wwiionline.com/pczone where you can sign up for our free trial. The password is 'WARZONE' and you can sign up any time between now and Friday August 20.

One piece of advice before you start blasting though: find a good squadron of players to team up with. It can mean the difference between spending the war as a hero or in a hospital.



Any colour, so long as it's battle grey.



DVD-Video Movies

The E3 fallout continues with Activision offering up its showcase for your viewing pleasure. It includes *Rome: Total War*, *Call Of Duty: United*

Offensive, *The Movies* and *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*. All classics in the making, so whack it in your DVD player and get watching.



ALSO ON THE DVD... DEMOS OF *SILENT STORM SENTINELS*, *AURA: FATE OF THE AGES*, *BRAVE DWARVES: BACK FOR TREASURES*, *3D HOCKEY* AND THIS MONTH'S INDIE ZONE GAME – *DEMONSTAR*. MOVIES OF *NEXUS*, *THREE BLACK & WHITE 2* CREATURE ANIMATIONS, *TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE* AND THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE FUTURE OF THE FPS FEATURE, PLUS FIVE *WARCRAFT: THE FROZEN THRONE* MAPS, FIVE MODS OF THE MONTH (ALL FOR UT2004) AND ALL THE LATEST PATCHES...

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GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

PIRATES!

Sid Meier may be most famous for the legendary *Civilization* series, but his own favourite creation is a rather more salty affair. *Richie Shoemaker* can't help but agree...

SID MEIER is a refreshingly modest fellow. Despite the praise heaped on him by pundits over the years – some of whom would have you believe he invented interactive gameplay as we know it – Meier is far more interested in citing his own influences than the countless imitators that came after.

So, just as it'd be impolite not to mention the impact games like *Herzog Zwei*, *Utopia* and *Mega Lo Mania* had on *Command & Conquer* and the early real-time strategy genre, Sid Meier feels that were it not for a long-forgotten game called *The Seven Cities Of Gold*, his 1987 'swashbuckling simulation' *Pirates!* would never have existed.

Released in 1984 for the Atari 800 and Commodore 64, *Seven Cities* was a

seminal influence on the Baltimore developer. Up until *Pirates!*, he was becoming something of a career military specialist, having worked on such simulations and war-themed strategy games as *Silent Service*, *F-15 Strike Eagle* and *Gunship*, perhaps the best simulation of the entire decade. Having achieved a certain amount of success with these titles however, Meier was eager to explore new themes, and *Seven Cities* provided him a key to unlocking new avenues of gameplay.

"That game had the biggest influence on the design of *Pirates!*," says Meier. "It showed it was fun to explore, discover and be part of a grand historical world."

Seven Cities casts you as an explorer, sent to colonise and conquer the New

World – but unlike so many other games with an appreciation of history, it was no overburdened simulation. Instead, it offered a level of accessibility and charm uncharacteristic of the time, and brought with it a number of small gameplay innovations that, though crude, remain largely unexplored to this day.

(As an historical aside, Meier was so enamoured with the game that he later managed to coax its creator, Dan Buntin, away from EA to work at Microprose, where Meier was co-founder. Among his new colleagues, Buntin was keen to develop *Civilization*, yet stood aside for Meier, and so it was he who cemented his status as a legendary game designer. Buntin is sadly no longer with us, but you can't

help but wonder how different *Civ* might have been if he'd headed the project...)

HELLO SAILOR

With his efforts on *Gunship* complete and having finished designing the third in the respected 'Command' series, *Conflict In Vietnam*, Meier had already begun work on *Pirates!* during 1986. However, his interest in the subject and the desire to develop a game set during the buccaneering days of New World expansion was ignited long before.

"I've always been intrigued by pirates," he says. "As a kid, I'd read books about pirates and play pirate games, so it was kind of a dream come true to design my very own pirate game. I wanted *Pirates!* to be a game where



GAME: Pirates!

DEVELOPER: Microprose Software

PUBLISHER: Microprose Software

RELEASED: 1987

INFLUENCED: There've been countless games made in the image of the original *Pirates!*. From *The Patrician* to *Sea Dogs* to *Cutthroats*, a new Caribbean adventure appears practically every year, and each time the influence of Sid Meier is stamped all over it. Aside from the swashbuckling theme however, *Pirates!* was one of the first historical games to break free of the dull and dry gameplay of more traditional simulations. By merging a number of gameplay styles, it fostered a sense of a fun, freesailing adventure often imitated (but rarely matched) by the games of today.

PROFILES

Sid Meier is a legend in the games business, having created dozens of obscenely successful titles over the last 20 years. But you knew that, right? What you may not be aware of is that Sid once lived in Switzerland, has quite a canny knowledge of 'soccer' – the Arsenal especially – and his rather unassuming car could do with a thorough spring clean.



NAME: Sid Meier

ROLE ON PIRATES!:

Designer, programmer, figurehead

WHERE IS HE NOW? Still

working on the fresh *Pirates!* – an all-new, high-gloss, high seas remake due later this year on PC. He's worked on a few games in between times too.

you could make your own story and live your own unique pirate adventure each time you played. Of course, since I'd spent so much time as a kid learning about pirates, the research was already done. The challenge was finding a way to deliver the experience to players that I'd always envisioned.

"To do that, the game had to be open-ended and involve lots of different gameplay elements, from strategy to adventure to action to role-playing. I wanted to make a game that would give players a chance to be a true pirate hero – living the adventurous life of a pirate in the 17th century Caribbean."

Meier continues: "What we had in mind was a version of a classic adventure. There were loads of

adventure games back then, and in most of them you had to type in commands letter-by-letter. We wanted a game that had the same kind of depth, but which felt more like a movie, where you go

"Back then, games didn't have to fit in with a genre – it didn't have to be a first-person shooter or an RTS"

SID MEIER CREATOR, *PIRATES!*

from scene to scene. The important thing is that, back then, games didn't have to fit in with a genre – it didn't have to be a first-person shooter or an RTS. All these elements – action, strategy, combat, trading – would seamlessly fit

together to tell a story, whether you wanted to become a famous pirate, find treasure or make money."

Finding the right team to help bring his vision to life wasn't difficult. Meier's

list of previous collaborators was without equal, and his role as co-founder of Microprose meant he could pick from a list of prodigious talent, among them Michael Haire who'd worked on *Gunship* and would

later create graphics for *Civ*, *Civ II* and *Alpha Centauri*.

"We had a great group of talented folks already in place at Microprose," he agrees. "As a matter of fact, my current partner at Firaxis, Jeff Briggs, and a number of our artists worked on the original *Pirates!* with me, so it's great to be working with them again on the new game."

For Meier, getting the team he wanted was key to the success of *Pirates!*, as his approach to game design is more collaborative and open than most. "As with all of the games I create, the design of *Pirates!* was born through an iterative prototyping process," he explains. "I started with a playable prototype and then we played and

improved, played and improved, until we'd made a game that we thought was really fun.

"The great thing about this approach is that we constantly tested, balanced and changed things as we went, so in the end we made the game we intended to make. This process took about a year for the original *Pirates!* – it worked well,

so we're using the process again for the development of the new edition. Of course, the process takes a little longer these days."

PLAIN SAILING

And while some developers would balk at Meier's organic development style, there's no faulting the results. Not only is *Pirates!* a classic game, but its development was famously easy going as well. And as you can tell from his continued efforts to update the game, Meier's regrets are technology-related and not to do with gameplay.

SETTING SAIL FOR THE FUTURE

PIRATES! AHOY!

As you're no doubt aware, Sid Meier is currently working on a new edition of *Pirates!*, one far more advanced than the graphical makeover that was 1993's *Gold* edition. The core premise of the game is thankfully unchanged, with your character able to carve out huge fortunes or a daring reputation on the high seas. What's new is the overall look of the game, with impressive 3D graphics lending the game a far more cinematic (albeit cartoony) feel than was allowed previously.

The passing of time has also given Meier plenty of scope to borrow and steal gameplay features from other games – *Metal Gear Solid* and *Parappa The Rapper* being the two most obvious. Such features should now promote a greater degree of accessibility.

Sadly, there are no multiplayer options in the remake, which means we'll be keeping a close eye on the massively multiplayer homage *Pirates Of The Burning Sea* – just in case it manages to deliver the goods.



Stand and deliver! Oh no, wrong genre.

"Clearly, we didn't have the graphics technology we have today, so I had to rely on the player's imagination to bring the gameplay to life visually," he says. "My philosophy has always been to create a great gameplay experience regardless of the technology available at the time. The gameplay always comes first. As for the game itself, I was able to make the game I'd hoped to make."

Like so many of Meier's early games, *Pirates!* made its debut on the ubiquitous Commodore 64, despite the increasing prominence of the 16-bit machines. Versions for the Apple and PC appeared almost immediately thereafter, but it wasn't until 1989

that the ST and Amiga received 16-bit conversions.

"The Apple version was a straight port and I worked with another programmer on the project to produce it," explains Meier. "Other versions had separate development teams and I worked with them too."

"However, at that time, during 1986-87, there was a very small

installed base for the ST and Amiga, so the fact that the game did very well on pretty much every available platform was exciting. Each platform was quite different and offered something unique.

"For instance, the Amiga offered enhanced graphics and sound, along with the chance to change the control scheme by using the mouse predominantly. I think *Pirates!* was a fun game on all of the platforms it was eventually released on, but the C64 version was the one we developed first and it was definitely my favourite."

GOING FOR GOLD

As the final weeks of testing and balancing approached, Meier began to allow others access to the code. The feedback within Microprose was unanimous.

"People were definitely excited about *Pirates!*. I think it offered a totally unique experience for gamers and had something for everyone. Then the magazine reviews came in and they were very positive – we received some great honours and awards. I'm never



Students of the world unite.

"ARRRGH! IT'S THE NOTORIOUS PIRATE: MARQUIS OGILBY! HE'S CHASING US, CAPTAIN!"



SHE'S FLYING PIRATE COLORS, CAPTAIN. SHALL WE? CLOSE FOR BATTLE HAIL FOR NEWS SAIL AWAY



Check out the anti-aliasing on those arms.

THE GOVERNOR INTRODUCES YOU TO HIS YOUNG DAUGHTER. SHE IS PRESENTLY BEING COURTED BY ADMIRAL CLINTON, BUT SHE SEEMS INTERESTED IN YOU! DO YOU?
MAKE PLEASANT CONVERSATION.
PROPOSE MARRIAGE.



So long as there's no mention of cigars love, you should be OK.



From a time when games still required a modicum of imagination...

quite sure how games will sell, but we knew *Pirates!* was very unique and lots of fun, and we hoped people would enjoy playing it for a long time. I'm happy we were able to deliver such a fun experience to players."

NEVER-ENDING STORY

The *Pirates!* story didn't end there, of course. In 1993, after *Civilization* was complete, Meier went back to his old code and gave it a graphical makeover.

"The *Gold* version was meant to be the ultimate PC version of the game, taking advantage of all those powerful 486 computers. It was also designed to work with a new operating system called Windows (3.1). As I said, I've always been most fond of the original C64 version, but I did get a bit of inspiration from *Pirates! Gold*, as well as some artwork to get my prototype rolling for the 2004 edition."

Of course, Sid Meier has come a long way in the 17 years since the original

Pirates! set sail. Three *Civ* games have come and gone – four if you include *Alpha Centauri*. Then we've had *Railroad Tycoon*, *Colonization* and a number of impressive strategy games. In-between them all, Meier has

JAMESON VS. SPANISH FORT



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Way Of The Exploding Fist it was not, but fighting provided a welcome break.

continually helped out with other projects, *The Sims*, *M1 Tank Platoon* and *Age Of Mythology* among them. Perhaps this is why a true *Pirates!* sequel has been so long in coming.

"I'd been thinking about making another *Pirates!* for some time, but I've also been a bit busy making other games," Meier says. "*Pirates!* was always a game I'd planned to revisit however, and it's only now that I think we can deliver an incredible visual experience to complement what has, over the years, proved to be an incredible gameplay experience."

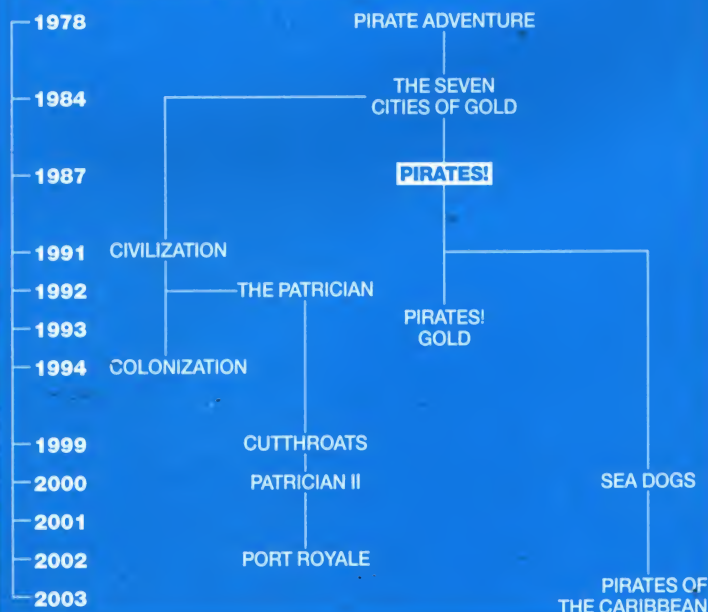
Meier is clearly excited by his new venture – but how does the veteran

developer view the original game today? Did it change the world of gaming for the better?

"Well, *Pirates!* broke some new ground in the early days of the gaming industry, certainly," he says, almost reluctantly. "It's also had a positive influence on some games that've been created since then, but the main thing is that people enjoyed it and still hold fond memories of the game – and that's the greatest compliment." [E2]

FAMILY TREE

There've been a fair few pirate-themed games over the years, many of them strategy titles geared towards trade, as well as a few adventures that more closely mimic Sid Meier's effort. *Sea Dogs* is the closest homage, while the long-running *Patrician* series provides a drier view of history.





THE LIONHEAD DIARIES



This month, Lionhead scribe and ex-ZONE hack Mark Hill gets animated in *Black & White 2*...

Check out the animations on the discs!



IT'S NOT easy making a cow dance. You need to spike its grass with four types of hard drugs (one for each of its stomachs), learn to play *Waterloo* using only

rusty bells and wave a steak knife in a threatening manner. Probably. Or you could always give a team of ridiculously talented animators the assignment.

Without resorting to animal cruelty, these guys cannot only make a cow dance; they can make it play basketball with its udders, fall over laughing or mock you with some acerbic tongue-pulling. But that's just the start of it. Watching the ape getting up and stretching after a long nap, the lion tensing every muscle in its body before lunging into a ferocious attack, or the wolf howling at the moon is almost enough to convince you that these are living beings.

Because the team – made up of Jamie, Andy, Nanette, Tamsin, Kelly and Jackie – haven't just animated *Black & White 2*'s Creatures. They've breathed life into them, allowing them to express a bewildering array of those elusive things so often lacking in games: emotions. The AI programmers may be responsible for giving them a brain, but it's the animators who give them a soul.

IT'S ALIVE!

Like all technological-dependent artforms, animation has come a long way in the last few years. I remember marvelling at how real the dog in *Toy Story 2* was, and our Creatures are every bit as alive. Perhaps more so, because they respond not to a Hollywood script, but to the complex events happening all around them.

The Pixar connection isn't a coincidence either – a guest animator from the mega-successful film studio is one of many to have dropped by the



It might be a complex process, but the result is a very natural animation.

offices of *Black & White Studios* to impart a masterclass or two.

But while they're by far the most spectacular, the Creatures aren't the only animated beings in *Black & White 2*. Every villager going about their daily business and every warrior locked in mortal battle

has been carefully simulated. What's more, the team goes to any lengths necessary to make each one as realistic and believable as possible.

Working in an office full of animators is an unnerving experience. There you are, quietly tapping away at your keyboard

“The animators have breathed life into the Creatures, allowing them to express those things that are so often lacking in games: emotions”

MARK HILL FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD STUDIOS



No need for that, you little monkey...

and sipping your weak coffee, when someone gets up, pretends to be slapped in the face, trips over a desk and throws themselves across the room. One moment they're pulling faces in a mirror, the next they're hitting each other with wooden swords or watching nature documentaries.

THE BONE DOCTORS

But for every minute of games and slapstick, there are hours spent slaving over computer-generated skeletons, perfecting every movement.

“Imagine the only way you could move was if someone grabbed your bones one at a time and tweaked them into different positions,” explains Lionhead animator Andy Brunton. “And we work at 30 frames-per-second, which means the character changes position 30 times every second that passes by.”

The task is made more complex by the freeform nature of *B&W2*. The morphing of creatures, tiny to huge, good to evil, fat to thin, strong to weak and young to old, all has to be taken into consideration.

The most daunting part of the process though, occurs in the frequent meetings, where all of Lionhead's animators gather to examine and critique each others' work. As Andy puts it: “You don't want to be in a room of 20 animators with your work up on the big screen being scrutinised frame-by-frame if it's anything less than your best effort.” That's when the swords come out again. And this time it's for real.



Each Creature is imbued with its own personality.



Once the realistic fur is added, the Lion really comes alive.

We've set up a forum where you can tell us exactly what you want to read in forthcoming *Lionhead Diaries*. Vent your spleen at boards.bwgame.com

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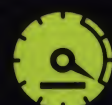
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D-Day the game, perfectly recreates this turning point, as players plan and execute the turning points in the liberation of Europe: *the first hours of the beach landing at Omaha Beach, the paratrooper attack on Sainte Mère Eglise, the taking of the Cherbourg harbour, operation Cobra, the battle of the Falaise pocket, and the liberation of Normandy in August 1944.* D-Day features footage from historical archives as well as interviews with D-Day veterans, blended seamlessly with stunning 3D graphics, immersive tactical gameplay, engaging multiplayer modes, and a fully supported map editor.



For more information visit: www.d-daygame.com

